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THE NEW REPUBLIC

A Journal of Politics and the Arts

VOLUME 241 WASHINGTON, MARCH 11, 2010 NUMBER 4,878

Obama's World

Let's face it. America's foreign policy is hardly healthier than its economy. Of course, jobs and taxes still dominate the politics of the day. Republicans will likely be running election campaigns on those matters. But, as foreign policy comes into focus more and more, Democrats may seek refuge from Barack Obama's grand strategy and its consequences—or lack thereof. For, right now, Obama's frustrated foreign policy is little more than aimlessness.

His biggest decision to date has been Afghanistan. During the campaign, Obama spoke repeatedly (and in contrast to his words on Iraq) of the battle there as the good war—a bit unconvinced himself, as his lengthy review of his war policy revealed, and certainly not convincing to many of his enthusiasts. But Afghanistan is the war on which the Democrats campaigned. And it is the war that the president has now escalated, with the newly launched offensive in Helmand province that has already resulted in the effective capture of the Taliban stronghold of Marja.

Yet, even in his West Point address last December, Obama clung awkwardly to his ambivalence about the commitment he was making, promising to begin a drawdown of troops in 18 months. In other words, he enshrined his ambivalence into his policy. Or, as war correspondent Dexter Filkins writes in this issue ("The American Awakening," page 23), "The president announced an escalation and a de-escalation in the same speech. You have the resources now, he seemed to say, but your time is short. … But the fact remains that with those crucial sentences, Obama bared his intentions, and even his soul. … [I]t is difficult to imagine that the Taliban—and the Pakistanis—have not concluded that the Americans will soon be gone." If the president holds to these deadlines, we will be no closer to our goals than when we began. Thus, we hope he listens to the advice of Robert Gates and Hillary Clinton, who have counseled against premature departure.

Now find a globe and twirl it. It is hard to find examples of greater support for American goals. Start with Beijing and count the moves it has made to cut the United States down to size. Not just the demeaning modalities it stage-managed for Obama's visit to the People's Republic, when the president was treated like the visiting head of a trade delegation, but also the more substantive slights. Toning down our criticisms of China's human rights record and economic policies has gained us very little. From its obstinate refusal to consider sanctioning Iran to its brazen efforts to sabotage climate negotiations in Copenhagen, China has increasingly been flexing its muscles at our expense.

Turn the globe west to Moscow, and you will find a more modulated version of the Chinese stratagems. Peter Rutland of Wesleyan University argues that Obama's "reset" has actually misfired. Every time President Dmitri Medvedev has hinted that his government might lend us a hand, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin has stepped forward to gleefully crush these prospects. Even after a celebrated agreement allowing American troops and supplies into Afghanistan through Russian airspace, Moscow has reportedly only allowed a small trickle of flights.

Move your fingers south toward Tehran. It is there that Obama's foreign policy frustrations are most apparent. Determined to engage, the president initially refrained from loudly criticizing the dictatorship's savagery against its own people—and the dictatorship reciprocated with open disdain and mendacity at the negotiating table. Now the embarrassed administration seems to be getting serious about sanctions—but they are a long shot and much time has been wasted. And then, put the palm of your hand over Africa, where there are concentrated a series of political and humanitarian cataclysms that we would have thought might exercise the president's liberal constituencies, if not the president himself. Alas, not. To Sudan, Obama has dispatched a solicitous envoy who seems bent on conciliation with the country's rulers. It is a blinkered strategy that suggests a gangster government can commit genocide (twice!) and still be offered "carrots" by the world's superpower. Meanwhile, the human rights emergencies in Congo and Zimbabwe have been all but ignored.

As for Obama's grand foreign policy project—peace between Israel and the Palestinians—it has gone exactly nowhere. He has struck an adversarial tone with the Israelis in hopes of winning over the Palestinians. But his strategy has flopped so badly that it has merely left Mahmoud Abbas stranded. The president has also fallen into the trap set for all American presidents: the 1967 lines, which are actually the 1949 intermediate armistice lines, defined in the truce agreements as nothing but temporary. Pointing this out is not pedantry: Peace cannot be made by pretending that the wars never happened, or that the wars never changed anything permanently. In any case, borders are not the real issue. The fact is that there are two Palestines now. One of them, in Gaza, is explicitly committed to the destruction of the Jewish state—and is a grim portent of what could happen within an independent Palestine. The other, in the West Bank, is partially committed to coexistence and afraid to act in a moderate way. Will Obama ever recognize this?

After a year of the Obama presidency, these reservations about its foreign policy are not ideological—they are empirical. The thrust of Obama's strategy has been to rebuild U.S. credibility and create space for cooperation on our key priorities. But evidence of such success has yet to materialize. Obama acted on his dream and, thus far, has failed. Nobody likes to have his dream refuted by reality; but it is time for the reality-based community to act reality-based. We await this president's learning curve. ◆

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Nowhere Man

The vain search for Harold Ford's principles.

JONATHAN CHAIT

"Southern voters are interested in solutions," said Harold Ford Jr. in 2003. "They can spot a fake." Perhaps this explains Ford's subsequent decision to decamp from the South in search of a more gullible electorate.

Having lost a 2006 Senate race in Tennessee, Ford is now all but officially running in New York. His efforts to date offer a fascinating character study. All politicians, to varying degrees, have pliable beliefs that must bend and twist to mesh with political surroundings that change over time. Ford's distinguishing trait is that his principles are not merely pliable but completely liquid—they have no form of their own, taking the shape of whatever surrounds them.

Ford comes from a family that seems to regard politics as a lucrative profession. His father, a longtime member of Congress, was indicted (but acquitted) of bank fraud. One uncle was indicted for corruption, and another was convicted of insurance fraud. Harold Jr., groomed at elite institutions like St. Albans in Washington, always trod a more respectable path. After inheriting his father's House seat in 1996, Ford cultivated a centrist profile to keep himself viable for statewide (or national) office. He endorsed constitutional amendments requiring an annual balanced budget, outlawing gay marriage and flag burning, and permitting organized classroom prayer in public schools. Shrewdly claiming a seat on the capital markets subcommittee of the Financial Services Committee, he raised copious sums from Wall Street executives, who, in turn, he favored by endorsing tax breaks for capital gains.

Ford attracted a series of mostly favorable profiles in the national press, highlighting his charisma and centrist stands as a model for a new generation of Democrats. "Rigid ideology makes it easier to resist good ideas," he declared.

Ford's career, alas, did not proceed quite as hoped. Even admirers regarded him as "undisciplined and immature," as a friendly Democratic strategist told The New Republic in 2002. Much of Ford's reputation centered around his personal life. (He's "known on Capitol Hill for robust socializing," as *The Washington Post* delicately put it.) Ford ran for minority leader, only to be crushed by Nancy Pelosi, by a vote of 177-29. To the extent that he now receives any sympathy from the base of his party, it is because he was the subject, during his 2006 Senate run, of a vicious ad featuring a comely blond saying "Harold—call me."

Ford's transition to a new political milieu has entailed some awkwardness. Only a few years ago, he was filming ads in church, posing in front of a Confederate flag, and touting his "Tennessee values." He now seems to regard his former constituents as racist hillbillies. "There was so much bad racial stuff out of Tennessee on Obama," he tells Maureen Dowd. "I think my marriage is more accepted here than it would be in Tennessee."

Ford now embraces gun control and gay marriage, the latter of which, until recently, he wanted to ban via constitutional amendment. After calling for sealing the border and attacking President Bush from the right on immigration in 2006, he now takes a liberal stance. What about the border fence he favored? "Even if we had a fence now, we are not going to stop it," he told *The New York Times*, not explaining why he had supported such a futile gesture in the first place.

Ford had so much difficulty explaining his intellectual evolution that, at one point, he gave an interview to the *Daily News* only, as the paper reported, "under the condition that the questions be limited to his rationale for running, and not issues." (Southern voters may be interested in solutions, but, apparently, Northern voters aren't.)

None of this is to say, however, that Ford's prospective candidacy lacks ideological content. He is running as the voice of Wall Street. The financial industry deeply resents the Obama administration and congressional Democrats who, after bailing them out to prevent a broader economic collapse, are attempting to impose regulations to prevent such a recurrence and demanding that the large banks pay back a portion of their subsidy. Casting about for a champion, Wall Street's eyes turned to Ford.

The Tennessee expatriate turned out to be the perfect man for the job. He already had a foothold in the city through his financial services committee connections, a $1.8 million East Hampton vacation home his father had purchased in 2003, and a lucrative part-time job at Merrill Lynch. Ford breakfasts regularly at the Regency and relaxes at upper-class redoubts like the Waverly Inn. "Ford started hearing about [the backlash] at cocktail parties," reports *Politico*.

In a *New York Times* interview, Ford attempted to put a slightly more populist sheen on his candidacy:

> [T]he response I have gotten is overwhelming, from different categories, the spectrum of political leaders, people involved in politics, people representing different social and income classes in the city, be it the cabdriver on the way down here, who had positive things to say, and wanted to take a picture with me before I got out of the taxi, to people who are business leaders and leaders in the entertainment industry and media industry based here.

Truly, this is a trans-class coalition, ranging from rich businessmen to rich entertainment businessmen to rich media businessmen to cabdrivers—who, like all members of tip-based professions, are known for their frank assessments of their customers.

Ford has come out against the current health care legislation and in favor of "a huge tax-cut bill for business people, not only in New York but across the country." Ford has chosen to label himself an "independent voice," independence being defined as total subservience to Wall Street. (Ford promises, in an interview with *The Wall Street Journal*, "I would support no bill that does harm to New York's financial industry.")

Ford's candidacy is an epiphenomenon of Wall Street's retreat into a fantasy world. In this alternate reality, the titans of finance are innocent victims of a freakish accident, the Democrats' struggles result from their hostility to these victims, and the people are clamoring for a leader who will openly cater to their demands. The notion that Democratic primary voters in New York will embrace Ford may be more fantastical than the wildest investment scheme that predated the crash.

Harold—don't call me. We'll call you. ◆

TRB
From Washington

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Cover photo by Bruce Peterson

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THE NEW REPUBLIC (ISSN 0028-6583), Vol. 241, Number 3, Issue 4,878, March 11, 2010. (Printed in the United States on February 17, 2010.) Published bi-weekly (except for skipped publication dates of January 21, March 4, April 22, August 5, August 26, September 16, October 7, November 25, December 16 & 23, 2010) at 1331 H Street, NW, Suite 700, Washington, D.C. 20005. Telephone (202) 508-4444. Yearly subscriptions, $79.97; foreign, $119.97 (U.S. funds); Canada, $99.97 (U.S. funds). Back issues, $8.00 domestic and $10.00 foreign/Canada (includes postage & handling).

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Periodicals postage paid at Washington, D.C., and additional mailing offices. Rights and permissions: fax (202) 204-4871. Indexed in Readers' Guide, Media Review Digest. For hard copy reprints, call (202) 508-4444. Microform, Canadian Periodical Index, and CD-ROM are available through ProQuest, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Telephone (800) 521-0600. Postmaster: Send changes of address to The New Republic, P.O. Box 15818, North Hollywood, CA 91615-5818. Member, BPA Worldwide. Send letters and unsolicited manuscripts to letters@tnr.com. Poetry submissions must be e-mailed to poetry@tnr.com.

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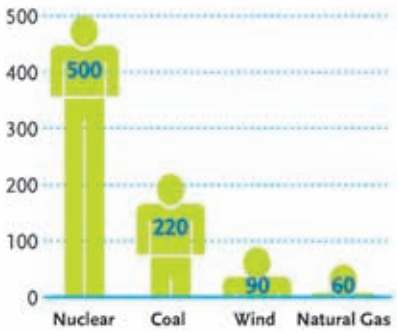

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The Mall

Disaster Relief

How to avoid a repeat of 1994.

When I studied the results of my national surveys of public opinion one week before the Massachusetts special election, I felt a wave of panic—a strangely familiar feeling. The results showed that the public's hope had given way to disillusionment; that Democrats had come to embody political gridlock and big spending; that conservatives were energized and Democrats demoralized; that the country was in revolt against elites. It was beginning to look like, gulp, 1994 all over again.

During that last electoral debacle, I was conducting surveys for President Bill Clinton, asking some of the same questions and getting the same answers. After one survey in May 1994, I wrote President Clinton, "The administration, the Democrats in Congress and the party face a disaster in November unless we move urgently to change the mood of the country." Even then, I couldn't imagine that Democrats would exacerbate the disaster, ending their decades of hegemony in the House.

President Obama and the Democratic Party need to urgently revisit 1994. By paying close attention to the lessons of that year—lessons about presidential leadership, the consequences of congressional melodrama, the need for an economic narrative and for a defining choice in the election—the worst can be avoided.

At about this stage in the electoral cycle, in midwinter, we were feeling pretty satisfied with ourselves. The State of the Union address on January 25 hailed the previous year's passage of the Clinton economic plan, NAFTA, and the Brady Bill. Health care reform was still supported by half the country. Clinton's approval rating stood at 58 percent.

Then, it all went tragically and almost comically downhill. The State of the Union glow was blotted out by a media frenzy when a special prosecutor subpoenaed White House officials to testify before a grand jury on the Whitewater land deal—and the president was forced to defend his wife's honor at a prime time press conference. The president's job approval plummeted eight points—and support for health care dropped ten. Paula Jones kicked off May with her sexual harassment suit. And, by the June publication of Bob Woodward's *The Agenda*—and his characterization of the Clinton White House in a word, "chaos"—the president's approval had fallen to 45 percent.

The Democrats had depended on being viewed more favorably than the Republicans—and that had been true in every election since 1962, as well as when President Clinton took office. But, during Clinton's first term, congressional Republicans came to understand that opposing the president bolstered their own numbers. The battle over the president's economic plan left the parties at near parity. During the spring of 1994, Republicans alarmingly began rating higher than us.

By mid-June, I was so distressed about the diverging graph lines depicting the Republican and Democratic numbers that I convened a meeting of prominent political scientists to get their reactions. The political scientists were bemused by my worries about disaster and predicted a loss of 15 to 18 seats, if the president's approval held at 50 percent—where it stood at the time.

Alas, nobody anticipated the next act. There was the inglorious defeat of the president's crime bill by his own divided party in the House. With the Congressional Black Caucus rebelling against the bill's death-penalty provisions and the conservative Democrats standing against its assault-weapons ban, the popular measure was defeated just before the August recess—only three months before the election. Reporters battled to capture their own astonishment. *USA Today* called it a "shocking" loss that "plunged" the White House to what could be "its worst political defeat." In a hoarse voice, the president gathered reporters and upbraided his congressional opponents and vowed to "fight and fight and fight until we win." After a frantic ten days of campaigning against Congress, followed by high-wire negotiations, he finally won the vote on a Sunday night.

Clinton's approval fell to 39 percent after this fiasco—which voters interpreted as further evidence of Democratic incompetence and fractiousness. Congress's approval plunged, and voters warmed to the Republicans, who had moved to about a four-point advantage in party sentiment.

Six weeks before the election, on September 26, Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell announced that Congress would no longer try to pass Clinton's signature health care reform initiative. A stubborn 41 percent of Americans still supported the plan, but the president never provided his interpretation of the battle or any hope for future progress.

On Election Day, Democrats lost 54 seats in the House and eight in the Senate; they lost eleven governorships and 16 state legislative chambers. Republicans took control of both houses of Congress for the first time since 1952; they controlled a plurality of state legislatures for the first time in 40 years. I recall the pained meeting in the cabinet room of the West Wing—with the president seething, upset about the many friends who were defeated, and angry with his team and himself. When I saw my pre-Massachusetts poll, you can be sure I relived that meeting.

Will this election be that ghastly? For all the problems of this last year, President Obama's approval rating is at 48 percent—and has been stable since November. Assuming that the economy makes gains over the

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next eight months and Congress does not make a spectacle of itself, Obama's approval could easily be ten points higher than Clinton's was. That would pull us back from a landslide, at least in the theoretical models of the political scientists.

To be sure, the six-month battle in the House and Senate for the passage of health care reform has shattered the Democrats' image and taken their popularity to just above that of the Republicans (and, more important, taken the Democratic Congress's to just below). While serious reform has been tantalizingly close, the public views the process as rife with Democratic division, incompetence, big spending, and taxed health care benefits.

But, through it all, the Republicans have remained amazingly unredeemed. Unlike the party of Newt Gingrich and Bob Dole, which gained standing with each battle with Bill Clinton, today's Republican Party looks like a cult. During the 2008 campaign, the Republican Party fell to its lowest level in the history of our thermometers measuring the party's popularity, and it has not improved its standing since Election Day. The Republicans' widely held conviction that Obama has a hidden "socialist" agenda, and the ascendancy of Sarah Palin and Glenn Beck as ideological spokespeople, indelibly defines the party. At the same time, Tea Party candidates are contesting mainstream Republicans in primaries—dividing their base.

If I were writing a memo to the Democratic leaders, this is where I would begin. Put aside the rancor and gridlock and show a very different face. Take Paul Krugman's advice and quickly pass a version of the Senate health care bill. That will raise presidential and congressional approval ratings, just as Clinton bucked up Democrats by passing NAFTA and tax increases for deficit reduction—neither of which were popular at the time.

They must put the Republicans on the defensive. Make them an offer they can't refuse on bipartisan legislation they dare not oppose—jobs measures that help small businesses and energy-independence legislation. Then, force Republicans to cast tough and defining votes—on Wall Street bonuses and bailouts and limiting corporate spending on elections.

The president must, for extended periods, turn the spotlight away from Congress and show he is making progress. He must use the space to deliver his economic narrative. Unemployment is the inescapable subject of this election. The president has to offer a framework that explains the grave difficulties people are experiencing, how they happened, and his plan for fixing them. Even if the economy improves, voters will not credit him, unless he presses his case. Swing voters have resisted his assertions in the State of the Union that "[the Recovery Act] has helped save jobs," and, "after two years of recession, the economy is growing again." The voters we studied turned their dial meters sharply down upon hearing them. Unless voters palpably feel such improvements in their own lives, these types of assertions will turn them off.

Most importantly, Democrats must explain this election's stakes and frame the choice that voters face. This is something we failed to get right in 1994. In the summer before the election, we began to see some power in a populist narrative—"*[A] president trying to make a better life for ordinary people against Republicans who favor the wealthy and hurt the middle class*." But we could not define this choice in a way that similarly helped congressional Democrats.

That changed when Newt Gingrich announced his Contract with America. I wrote to the president in October that my research showed the Contract to be "a gift that should now form the centerpiece of Democratic communication." Our choice became: "*The Democrats want to go forward and address the problems of ordinary people. The Republicans in Congress want to go back to the Reagan policies of tax cuts for the wealthy, exploding deficits, and cuts in Medicare*." We could have tarred the Republicans as avatars of the status quo, if we had reminded voters of the "Reagan policies" that Republicans wanted to continue.

Unfortunately, we could not convince the president of this. Unknown to us at the time, he was taking advice from Dick Morris, who told him that Reagan and the Contract were popular. The president insisted on educating voters on our shared accomplishments, which made the election a referendum on the Congress, not a choice.

Fortunately, this election we are blessed with better timing. Democrats have already lived through their legislative nightmare. We have already had the benefit of Massachusetts to concentrate the mind. And, just as valuable, we have the lessons of history to guide our course.

STANLEY B. GREENBERG

Stanley B. Greenberg was a polling adviser to President Clinton and the author of Dispatches from the War Room: In the Trenches with Five Extraordinary Leaders.

Iran Contrarians

Ahmadinejad's Washington power couple.

Say what you want about Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, but "he knows how to work a room." So claims Flynt Leverett, the contrarian Iran analyst who, with his wife Hillary Mann Leverett, paid a visit to the Iranian president in New York City last fall. During the sit-down at Manhattan's InterContinental Barclay hotel with a group of invited academics, foreign policy professionals, and other Iranophiles, the Leveretts marveled at Ahmadinejad's attention to detail as the Iranian took copious notes and strove to pronounce their unfamiliar names correctly. "He addresses every person by name. He made a serious effort to address everyone's issue," Flynt says. "It was really striking, the retail politics aspect."

As former Bush White House officials, the Leveretts might seem unlikely company for the diminutive tyrant. But Ahmadinejad has reason to admire the married Middle East analysts. They are, after all, the most prominent voices in the U.S. media arguing that he was legitimately reelected last June, and that the opposition Green Movement is a flash in the pan. "There is no revolution afoot in Iran, and the social base of this movement is not growing; it is, in fact, shrinking," Flynt recently said on PBS's "NewsHour." He has made his case everywhere from MSNBC to "The Daily Show" to *The New York Times* op-ed page, where he and his wife have made three shared appearances since late May.

To the Leveretts, Ahmadinejad's Bill Clinton-like personal touch underscores their argument that, far from a thug repressing his people, he is, in fact, a charming leader with broad Iranian support—and one whose true nature the United States fails to understand. And, in any case, they say, moral indignation over his regime's character distracts us from clear strategic thinking. Both economic sanctions and the Green Movement will fail to contain Ahmadinejad's nuclear ambitions. America's only choice is to engage Iran, nuclear bomb or no. For that, they have earned the enmity of former friends and colleagues—and even drawn death threats. "We are portrayed as un-American, stooges of the regime," complains Hillary.

But it's not the Leveretts' ultra-realist policy views that are so discomfiting. It is the sense that they cross a line into making apologies for the loathsome Ahmadinejad. And that makes for one of Washington's most intriguing mysteries: How did two ex-Bush aides become

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the Iranian regime's biggest intellectual defenders?

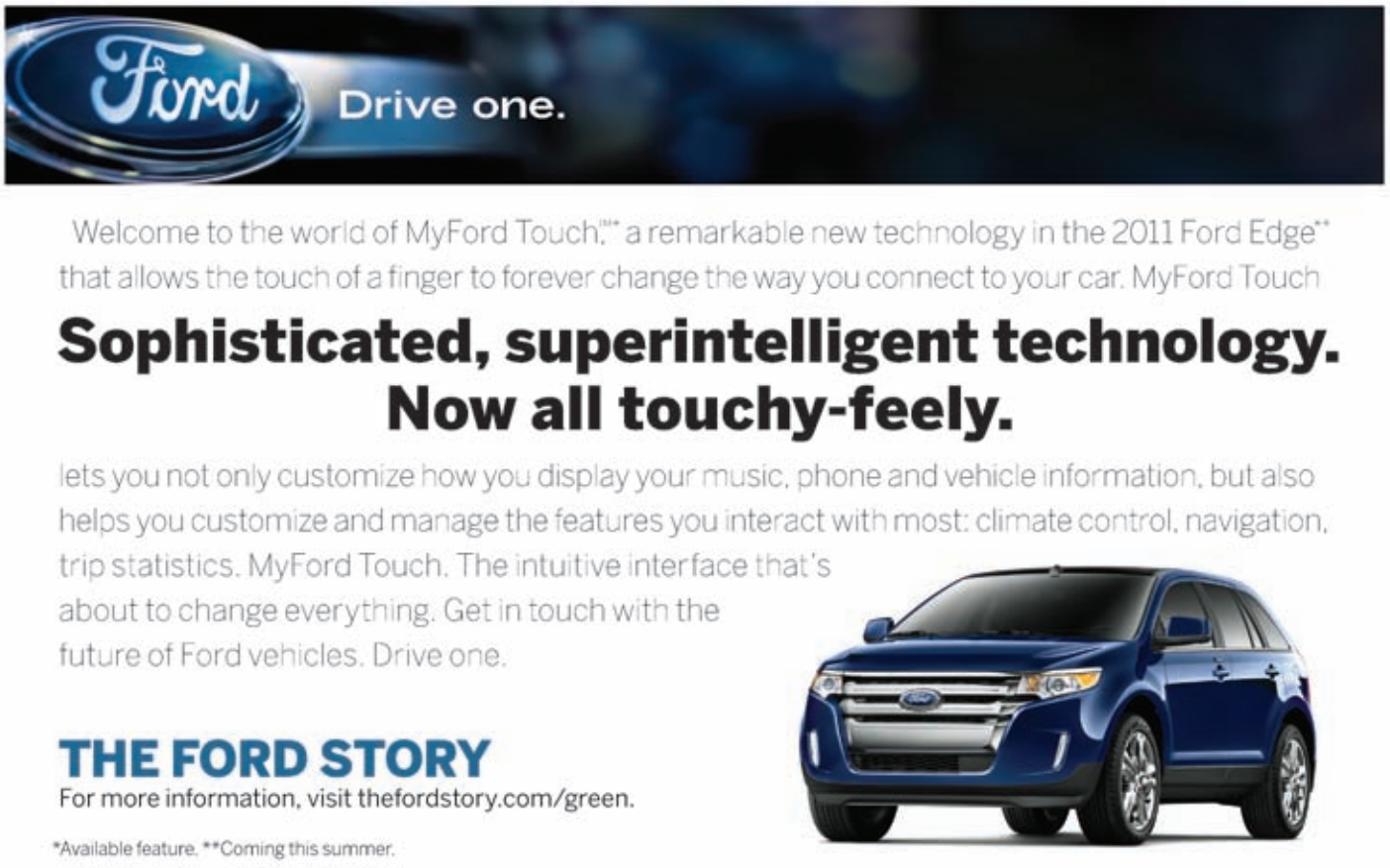
In the fall of 2001, Hillary Mann saw Flynt deliver a speech on the Arab-Israeli peace process and fell for him. Flynt was then a CIA officer with a Princeton Ph.D., on assignment to the State Department's policy planning staff. Hillary, nearly ten years his junior at 33, was a Brandeis and Harvard law graduate working at the United Nations. When Flynt asked Hillary to lunch, he told the *Times*' "Vows" column, "there was no plausible deniability" it was a date. By the time the two married in February 2003, they were both working on Bush's National Security Council (he as director for the Middle East, she as director for Iran and Afghanistan), planning their wedding during breaks from planning the Iraq war. "I find it a bit hard to think of the Bush White House as the Love Boat," cracked their best man, Richard Haass, then a senior State Department official, in his toast.

The Bush White House may have brought them together, but the couple soon turned against it. Flynt says he left his job the month after his wedding out of disillusionment with Bush's hawkish Middle East policies. Hillary departed soon after, spending several months at the State Department before leaving government. (One former White House official says that Flynt didn't quit but was fired for bureaucratic incompetence, including an office so unkempt that Condoleezza Rice herself was appalled. While admitting that he keeps "a messy desk," Flynt denies this account.) Flynt went on to advise John Kerry's presidential campaign and worked a stint at the Brookings Institution. In 2006, Hillary formed the consulting firm Stratega, which advises corporate clients on Middle Eastern politics.

That same year, the Leveretts began bashing Bush's Iran policy—specifically his rejection of a May 2003 memo from a mid-level Iranian diplomat offering comprehensive talks with the United States that would include Iran's nuclear program. Cheneyite hawks certainly had no interest in such a deal, but even former Secretary of State Colin Powell has cast doubt on whether the offer represented the regime's true thinking. Still, the media thrilled to the idea that a bellicose Bush had rejected talks. When the Leveretts sought to publish a *New York Times* op-ed on the subject in December 2006, the White House insisted on censoring it, and the *Times* theatrically published the heavily redacted version anyway. An *Esquire* profile soon cast the Leveretts as heroic dissidents standing athwart another blind march to war. The couple's new cachet drew influential Washingtonians to salon dinners they began holding at their home in suburban McLean, Virginia.

The Leveretts voted for Barack Obama in 2008, but, despite his efforts to broker a dialogue with Tehran, they found his attempts lacking and soon turned on him as well. By last spring, they were warning that Obama had already "lost" Iran, complaining that he had not halted Bush-era covert programs against Iran's nuclear program. They also complained that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and White House Iran point man Dennis Ross were too hawkish. "The administration's approach to Iran degenerates into an only slightly prettified version of George W. Bush's approach," they wrote in a May 24 piece for the *Times*, one that noticeably echoed Tehran's position. And then came the June 12 Iranian election.

In the days after the election, many foreign observers were sure it had been rigged. The votes had been counted suspiciously quickly, and Ahmadinejad's alleged 63 percent to 34 percent margin of victory struck many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Iran experts as implausible given the huge crowds supporting his challenger, Mir Hossein Mousavi. But, writing in *Politico,* the Leveretts argued against "wishful thinking." "AHMADINEJAD WON. GET OVER IT," huffed their headline. In early January, they took to the *Times* again to dismiss the significance of large anti-Ahmadinejad protests that had occurred the week before, arguing that pro-government crowds had been larger and that Mousavi had become "increasingly marginalized."

It's not obvious that this analysis is wrong—especially in the wake of disappointing Green turnout last week on the anniversary of the 1979 Iranian revolution—although, in a state willing to beat, arrest, and even kill protesters, gauging the popular mood is never simple. But the Leveretts' argument doesn't stop with an assessment of Iranian opinion. That was clear when I met with them at the New America Foundation, where Flynt is a fellow. (He also teaches at Penn State University.) Now 51, Flynt is tall, with close-cut gray hair, a salt-and-pepper goatee, and the fastidious manner common to national security professionals—a contrast to his chatty wife, now 42. I asked the Leveretts why, if Ahmadinejad enjoys such broad support, his regime has cracked down so brutally. In fact, they told me, Ahmadinejad has shown restraint. "It's become politically incorrect and impossible to say it, but … this government hasn't even begun to deploy the force it's capable of using," says Hillary. Even the videotaped shooting of Neda Agha-Soltan on a Tehran street was an "exceptional" and "isolated" case, she says. "There's a slightly flippant counter-response," Flynt says with a wry grin. "Why did the Nixon campaign order the break-in at the Democratic National Committee headquarters in the Watergate building when it was clear Nixon was going to win reelection by a landslide?" The Leveretts also sought to account for Ahmadinejad's threats against Israel as shrewd regional politics. "It does get to him when he's described to the outside world as anti-Semitic. He would describe himself as anti-Zionist," Flynt explains. "Resistance to Israel is an important theme to him. … If it's crazy, it's crazy like a fox."

The Leveretts are not just isolated politically, but also personally. After Haass, now president of the Council on Foreign Relations, wrote a recent *Newsweek* essay urging a U.S. push for regime change in Iran, the Leveretts posted a contemptuous online response that mocked their best man's involvement in planning the Iraq war. Haass, who declined to comment, is said to have been furious. Another person who once considered himself a good friend of the couple now says he's lost touch with them in part due to their policy views. And, when asked about erstwhile dinner guest Karim Sadjadpour, a prominent Iran expert at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Flynt acknowledges, "Once upon a time, we were closer to him than we are now. There are other people like that." The Obama administration is also baffled at how a couple that once cheered it on now accuses it of "diplomatic incompetence." "I hear from very senior people in the administration who say, 'What are Flynt and Hillary *doing*?'" says New America's Steven Clemons. Meanwhile, the Leveretts say they have been sent blood-spattered photographs of a dead Neda Soltan bearing the message: *This should be you.*

Some former friends and colleagues say the Leveretts seem to have changed. Flynt voted for Bush in 2000 and says he didn't oppose the Iraq war "on principle"—although he has been accused of softness on Middle Eastern strongmen before, including in a book he wrote about Syrian President Bashar Al Assad. His wife's resumé is more surprising. Hillary, who volunteers that she is Jewish, studied at Tel Aviv University and worked briefly at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee and the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. At the latter, she denounced efforts in 1997 to engage Iran's then-relatively moderate leadership and called for an economic crackdown against the country. "This is not the Hillary we remember," says one ex-Bush White House official.

What happened? Some critics accuse the Leveretts of becoming corporate shills. Their salon dinners, for instance, have included executives from oil companies that have done business in Iran, including Norway-based Statoil and French Total. The Leveretts firmly deny that they are peddling access or trying to affect policy for corporate gain. Steve Coll, president of the New America Foundation, says he recently conducted a review of their business ties and is "entirely satisfied there is no conflict. … The idea that their ideas are compromised is without foundation."

Perhaps the Leveretts were transformed by what they saw as Bush's blown opportunity to deal with Iran. Hillary says her dealings with Iranian diplomats as a Bush White House aide at the start of the Afghanistan war made her understand Tehran's willingness to engage. "It seems that the Leveretts are almost frozen in time circa 2003 on this," says Tufts University professor Daniel Drezner. The Leveretts have also come to accept the realist critique that Israel occupies too great a role in America's foreign policy calculus; Flynt clashed with fellow Bush officials about what peace-process concessions Israel should be asked to make, for instance. "For a lot of pro-Israel groups, these [views of Iran] are non-starters," he says.

ANTHONY RUSSO

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Or perhaps, on some level, they have actually grown to admire Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. In our meeting, I pressed them to say just how they feel about the Iranian leader. Geopolitics aside, did they consider him a despicable human being? "I think he's actually a quite intelligent man," Flynt replied. "I think he also has really extraordinary political skills." "[T]he idea that he's stupid or doesn't understand retail politics is also pretty divorced from reality," Hillary added. But that wasn't the question.

Michael Crowley

Weak Brew

The Tea Party's frustrated moderates.

Mark Skoda, one of the organizers of the first-ever national Tea Party convention in Nashville, is no revolutionary. "I get irritated when people say, 'Let's take our country back.' We have a country," he told one interviewer at the three-day-long gathering earlier this month. "In America, we only have to move the dial a little bit. We're not off the rails. I encourage people to not emotionalize things." As the convention's spokesman, Skoda would spend the weekend laboring to put a respectable, moderate face on the burgeoning movement, bragging at one point that the conference was a "businesslike environment with no signs, no crazy hats," where tea partiers were "positioned as responsible adults."

So I couldn't help but watch Skoda as he sat in a huge ballroom on the convention's second night, listening to Joseph Farah, the mustachioed editor of the far-right-wing website *WorldNetDaily*, work the crowd of 600 into a frenzy. "If Barack Obama even seeks reelection as president in 2012, he won't be able to go to any city, any hamlet in America without seeing signs that ask, 'Where's the birth certificate?' " Farah crowed from the podium.

The assembled conservatives guffawed and cheered through Farah's 40-minute-long diatribe—which went on to describe Obama's plot to destroy the free-enterprise system and build a socialist state in its stead—but Skoda just stared blankly ahead, looking down occasionally to fiddle with his iPhone. He couldn't have been pleased. Skoda and convention mastermind Judson Phillips have ambitious goals for the Tea Party movement. They aim to build their respective groups (Skoda is founding a Tea Party PAC; Phillips heads an organization called Tea Party Nation) into political players that can influence votes and tug candidates in their direction. But their quandary is as plain as the expression on Skoda's face during Farah's paranoid Friday night monologue: How can a movement whose base detests mainstream politics—not to mention, has a few screws loose—possibly build political clout?

Skoda, who, at the convention, wore a black turtleneck under a sport coat, doesn't fit the Tea Party stereotype. An information-systems executive for multinational corporations, he has lived all over the world, picked up multiple languages (I watched him charm a correspondent from Japan by chatting in Japanese), and learned his way around a press release thanks to years of orchestrating mergers and acquisitions.

Like most tea partiers, Skoda—who hosts a Tea Party-themed radio show in Memphis three times a week—tells the familiar story of being woken up by CNBC host Rick Santelli's on-air rant against mortgage bailouts last February. He took charge of the Memphis Tea Party shortly thereafter, spoke at rallies during the spring and summer, and brought a busload of protesters to Washington last September. When the planned national convention was reeling from negative press coverage in early January, Skoda called up Phillips—a Nashville criminal-defense attorney who was organizing the glitzy affair—to ask if he could help.

Skoda rationalizes some of the Tea Party's rough edges as a necessity of movement-building. "I think it's always useful to get people excited," he says. "Part of this movement is visceral. It's perfectly okay." But he is much more interested in practical politics than in bombast. Between speeches, he led a session on using Internet tools to run campaigns on the cheap. ("This is just what I need," said a man thinking about running for Congress in Ohio.) Meanwhile, Skoda's new PAC will funnel Tea Party money into campaigns that he thinks conservative Republicans can win.

Skoda and Phillips's philosophy is contributing to something of a schism within their movement. Integral to the Tea Party ethos is a kind of anti-politics: Both parties in Congress have gone bankrupt, tea partiers say, and, for some, "Republican" is an even dirtier word than "Democrat." But the pragmatists believe that, at least for the moment, getting what they want is going to require working within the two-party system. "The reality of life is, I'd be shocked if we elected any independents this year," says Phillips. "So it's gonna be Republicans to get a conservative majority."

Political realism, however, isn't what the Tea Party base wants to hear. Skoda alienated much of his Memphis group by unilaterally opting to endorse and fund local candidates. And several Tea Party activists grumbled about Phillips's decision to invite politicians to speak at the convention. "They need to hear from us, not us hearing from them," says one dissident who had previously left Phillips's organization. Add to this a number of other internal disagreements—for instance, Phillips pushed out several volunteers when they protested Tea Party Nation's for-profit status—and the Tea Party movement has sometimes seemed to be on the verge of devouring itself.

To the sidelined activists, Skoda's approach and the Nashville convention are the antithesis of what the movement should be about. "What's the difference between what he's doing and the federal government being tyrannical?" asks Mark Herr, leader of the Mid-South Tea Party, which split off from Skoda's Memphis group in late spring. "There's a rebellion against top-down leadership and a desire for bottom-up government."

On the last day of the convention, Herr and three other Tea Party Nation defectors showed up at the Opryland Hotel to hold a press conference. In the preceding weeks, they had united 34 of the state's Tea Party groups into the Tennessee Tea Party Coalition and wanted the media to know that *they* were the real grassroots endeavor. Though they declined to level outright attacks against the tea partiers participating in the convention ("We don't want to be drug into a contest with them," one explained), they did complain about the event's exclusivity and suggest that Phillips is excessively sympathetic to the GOP.

Whether the tea partiers will prove too busy fighting among themselves to fight the Republicans, the Democrats, and the system writ large is anyone's guess. But Skoda is pragmatic enough to know that he can't cut the non-pragmatists out of the coalition altogether. And so, his vision of winning elections remains in an awkward marriage of convenience with the likes of Farah, and anyone else who doubts Obama's citizenship. "Look, Joseph Farah—when you look at the statistics and the polling, there are some people who believe this is problematic," he told me, referring to the birth certificate. "Do I agree with all of his premises? I don't have to. That's America."

Lydia DePillis

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Cheesehead

Against Brett Favre.

The New Orleans Saints' strategy in last month's NFC championship game was primitive and perfectly suited: Take advantage of quarterback Brett Favre's 40-year-old body by inflicting a caveman's clubbing. Hundreds of pounds of muscle and anger and adrenaline hit him at high speed a total of 17 times, and Favre, perhaps playing the last game of his career, managed to withstand the punishment until the third quarter, when he severely hurt his ankle. He limped on the sidelines and was basically immobile and should have taken himself out of the game then, regardless of the stakes. But it was never going to happen, because pain in public for Brett Favre has always been dependable publicity.

The more Favre got whipped, the more you could hear the brains of the sportswriters sifting for the clichés of glory and tragedy that have passed for analysis since the days of Grantland Rice. The next day, John Feinstein wrote on the *Washington Post* website that Favre had "come to embody Hamlet" and described him as "heroic" and "tragic." Larry Canale wrote on a *New York Times* blog that Favre "was as game as ever, and he would not quit." James Penrice at *Catholic Online* wrote that it was time to "give Favre his due as a man whose spiritual strength overcomes the weakness of mind and body."

Oh My God …

Brett Favre wasn't heroic. He was a hubristic fool. He wasn't a warrior. He was an arrogant braggart who, whatever the homespun hokum of his Mississippi roots, perversely reveled in his pain to the point where his agent publicly disseminated pictures of his injuries like cheesecake photos—a deep-purple ankle lumpish and swollen, an equally deep-purple hamstring. The pictures did what Favre hoped they would: further reinforce his image as The Gladiator, The Samurai, The White Knight for whom guts in football, however stupid and wanton, is what counts.

The sportswriters should be partially excused. They were writing on deadline and searching for an angle, which Favre supplied: the removal of his uniform pants after the game like a slow striptease; the disclosure that, when he hurt his ankle, he could hear a crunching sound inside; the walk through the tunnel of the Superdome to meet his wife and children as if it were a tracking shot straight out of Scorsese. He has always been clinically grandiose beneath the "aw-shucks" country boy cover. He knows what sportswriters crave, not just the junk food of the noble warrior but the soul-aching confessional, which largely accounts for why he admitted to being a Vicodin addict in 1996. He knew that, when he decided to play a football game the night after his father died in 2003, it would not be perceived for the act of self-absorption it was, but as an act of courage after he carefully spun it as *that's what pappy would have wanted.*

Brett Favre wasn't heroic. He was a hubristic fool.

Favre has crafted his public persona as carefully as Tiger Woods, only more so. Unlike Tiger, Favre knew when to out himself, in his case, for drug use, before someone else did it for him. He relished the soap opera of whether he would come back last season after saying he had retired, acting like a general being begged to return to the field of battle.

Woods is still a great competitor and winner, his superhuman confidence on the golf course earned. Favre has the same confidence on the football field, but it has caused him to have a schizophrenic career, sometimes great but not great overall. Supporters will point to the NFL records he holds for passing yards and touchdowns. He will get in the Hall of Fame. But, if the goal is to win it all, which it is, Favre should have done it more than just once in 19 seasons.

He has thrown a record 30 interceptions in postseason games, not because he was always hurried in the pocket, but because of his delusions of magnificence in thinking he could always connect, even when three defensive backs enveloped a receiver. To their credit, many sportswriters pointed this out in their accounts of the championship. He did it with less than 20 seconds left in the fourth quarter against the Saints, throwing a pass across his body that had no chance of completion and a much greater chance of interception, which is what happened and what led to his team's loss in overtime, 31-28. He threw a devastating interception two years earlier in a playoff game against the New York Giants. And the same against the Philadelphia Eagles in a playoff game a couple of years before that.

Against the Saints, he could have scrambled for at least several yards to set up a likely winning field goal and a trip to the Super Bowl. But he could not scramble because he could not run. He could not run because of the combination of the ankle injury and the Saints' merciless rush. It was their sadism versus his masochism, football S&M, and the sadists always come out on top.

Even still, Favre's playing in agony was a spectacle the public loved—and a remarkably pernicious one at that. The millions of kids who look up to him, from Pop Warner to high school, will believe that the only way to play is at the expense of your body and that any thought of later consequences is the domain of cowards. And the NFL—which has taken its share of criticism recently over what appears to have been a complete disregard for the long-term effects of injuries in pro football, particularly head injuries—can rest easy that the ultimate impact of investigations into the game's brutality will be minimal. Fans don't want a less bloody product. Water the game's violent core down and what do you have?

Soccer with more scoring.

Brett Favre buys into that vision of football as well as anyone, for now. Ten years hence, when, like so many other former players, he may only be able to hobble from place to place, he might reconsider. But, if he can't walk, will it really matter?

Buzz Bissinger

Buzz Bissinger is the author of Friday Night Lights, A Prayer for the City, and, most recently, Shooting Stars, co-written with LeBron James.

Anastasia Vasilakis

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[1] Financial Times, July 19 2009, Title: How to End America's Deadly Coal Addiction by: Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

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The Mousavi Mission

Iran finds its Nelson Mandela.

ABBAS MILANI

Traditional Iranian husbands, the sort found in the highest ranks of the Islamic Republic, sometimes refer to their wives as "the house." For them, this is not just an expression of their understanding of gender relations. It is viewed as a necessary euphemism, vital protection for a woman's honor. The mere uttering of her name, after all, might compromise her chastity.

It is telling, therefore, that Mir Hossein Mousavi courted and eventually married Zahra Rahnavard. When they met, in 1969, Rahnavard was already an acclaimed pioneer in the field of Islamic feminism, as well as a sculptor and critic and all-around star of the intellectual scene that throbbed in Tehran at that time. But it was her political theories that vaulted her farthest: Rahnavard proffered the kind of critique of patriarchy percolating in the Western academy at the time. Yet she didn't join her sisters in the West in launching an all-out assault on tradition. Yes, Islam has misogynistic elements, she argued in her speeches. But those misogynistic elements are not necessarily native to Islam. They only prevail because of the male domination of the faith.

For Mousavi, the choice of Rahnavard as his bride was particularly daring—and reveals much about him. Men of his generation, particularly those with a religious proclivity, rarely married assertive intellectuals, let alone intellectuals with greater stature and more impressive curricula vitae. Throughout his career, friends and foes have referred to him as "the husband of Zahra Rahnavard."

Zahra Rahnavard's husband, of course, has emerged as the towering figure of the Iranian democratic movement—the man whose campaign inspired so much hope and whose thwarted election has unleashed an unprecedented wave of protest. Yet, for all his centrality to these events, he remains essentially a fuzzy figure in most press accounts.

At first glance, his long career is a riddle: How could he pos-

Mousavi's showdown with the regime is, in fact, the culmination of his long struggle.

Edel Rodriguez

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sibly represent the forces for liberalism and democracy when he served as such a loyal foot soldier in Ayatollah Khomeini's revolution? During his eight years as prime minister, back in the 1980s, the regime committed terrible atrocities. It was involved in a brutal military conflict—an eight-year war that Iran prolonged needlessly.

But, even without this history, Mousavi would be enigmatic. His aversion to the limelight, soft voice, and natural shyness make him a perfect tabula rasa. At times in these past few months, Mousavi has seemed nothing more than a passive actor in all the grand historic drama of the Green Revolution. Did he ever intend to unleash a movement challenging the very core of the Islamic Republic? Has he simply been carried along by the enthusiasms of his supporters?

But there are enough clues lurking in the annals that a profile of the man begins to emerge. There are simple facts like his courtship of Zahra Rahnavard—a defiant act that prefigured a lifetime of subtly bucking the forces of reaction. The Green Movement's showdown with the regime is, in fact, the culmination of Mousavi's long struggle.

Mir Hossein Mousavi Khamenei was born in 1941 in the northwestern city of Khameneh. He is, as his full surname suggests, a distant relative of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei—his lifelong nemesis. His father was a tea merchant of modest means. When he left home for the newly established National University in Tehran, he didn't land in the coveted schools of medicine, engineering, or law. Still, it was pretty impressive for a kid from the provinces to win entry into the Faculty of Art and Architecture. At the time Mousavi started, the National University was filled with children of the upper class. But, before he finished there, the state nationalized the institution and diversified its socioeconomic composition. It became a hotbed of opposition to the Shah. Mousavi, in fact, helped create and shape the school's Islamic student association, one such anti-regime outpost.

By the time he received a master's degree in architecture in the late '60s, the politics of the Iranian intelligentsia had begun to shift. Modern men and women no longer equated Islam with superstition. Mousavi began hanging out at the Hosseiniye Ershad—a meeting place built by some of the more moderate supporters of the Ayatollah Khomeini. The whole program at Hosseiniye Ershad was intended to appeal to the modern sensibilities of the urban, educated middle classes who might otherwise have avoided mosques—people very much like Mousavi and Rahnavard.

One of Hosseiniye Ershad's main draws was a fiery orator called Ali Shariati. Hardly a man of great erudition, Shariati had a gift for ideological alchemy, which perhaps explains his outsize influence. While studying in Paris, he had inhaled all the revolutionary doctrines of the era. His lectures in Tehran attempted to synthesize Marx and Muhammad, Imam Hussein (the quintessence of the Shia cult of martyrdom) and Che Guevara. It all added up to a sort of liberation theology. His eclectic brand of Shiism promised to usher in revolution in this world and salvation in the next.

Shariati's inherently incongruent ideology was emblematic of the incongruent political coalition that came together in Iran's pre-revolutionary days. Khomeini himself sometimes usurped Marxist rhetoric in his fusillades against the United States and capitalism, as well as in his encomiums for the poor. In his critique of the traditional Shia clergy—a group that he described as sclerotic and superstitious, enemies of progress and true Islam—Shariati had exempted Khomeini, praising him for his fierce fight against despotism and colonialism.

This was a message that resonated with Mousavi. Like Shariati, he boiled over with anger at the ancien régime. He too attacked the Shah's despotism and dependence on the West. (He wrote essays under the nom de guerre "Rahro," the seeker, or traveler.) Like his mentor, Shariati, Mousavi grew enamored of Khomeini, especially in the euphoric glow of revolution. But, ever since his days at Hosseiniye Ershad, we can also see in Mousavi traces of Shariati's fulminations against conservative, traditional mullahs, a dislike that long predates the Green Movement.

In some respects, Shariati was one of the most important ideologues of the revolution. He died two years before the Shah's regime toppled. And, in Shariati's inconsistent but seductive rhetoric, there were hints of the futile promise of the revolution—the idea that a new regime might manage to fulfill the greatest hopes of the left-wing radicals, the Qom-based clerics, and the middle classes who hoped to synthesize those poles. Only in the face of the Shah's repression could the tensions inherent in this coalition be sublimated. And, even then, they were real. Before Shariati's death, Khomeini denounced and effectively banned him from speaking at the Ershad.

Indeed, these ideological tensions remain the dominant ideological fault line in Iranian politics. The reform movements—embodied first by President Mohammad Khatami and, now, represented in the leadership of the Green Movement—are, in essence, the wing of the revolution's unwieldy coalition that feel betrayed by the despotic rightward turn of the regime.

By any measure, the rise of a little-known architect and newspaper editor to the highest ranks of the new regime was surprising, even meteoric. But, by the time of the revolution, Mousavi had built a reputation as a leading intellectual and man of unquestionable pieties. And, at that moment, the regime needed a façade that projected a spirit of inclusion, that could ballast its far-flung coalition. With both his demeanor and ideological roots in the Ershad, Mousavi exuded exactly those reassuring qualities. What's more, he had a powerful friend and patron in Ayatollah Mohammad Beheshti, the secretary of the Islamic Revolution Council. Shortly after the revolution, Beheshti, with an assist from Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Ali Khamenei, organized the Islamic Republican Party and named Mousavi editor-in-chief of the party's newspaper. When Beheshti and more than 70 other top leaders of the regime were killed by terrorist attacks, Mousavi, having only served a brief tenure as foreign minister, began his rapid ascent to the premiership.

Today's great struggle in Iranian politics pits Mousavi against Ali Khamenei. It was that way from, more or less, the birth of the regime. During Mousavi's tenure as prime minister, Khamenei was president. In those days, authority rested primarily in the hands of the prime minister, while the presidency was a largely symbolic office. Khamenei, however, never accepted such limits. He consistently overstepped onto Mousavi's turf, attempting to grab power and interfere. Genuine ideological differences undergirded this rivalry. Khamenei was increasingly aligned with the conservative clergy and with the forces in the bazaar who were opposed to the state's domination of the economy and demanded a freer hand in making profits from their activities. His ideological guru was a man named Navvab Safavi—the founder of the Islamic terrorist group Fadayan Islam (Martyrs of Islam). Mousavi, on the other hand, pushed for the state to take a more activist role in managing the economy.

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As president, more than once, Khamenei tried to oust Mousavi. He solicited the help of other top clerics like Rafsanjani and Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri. Both declined to join the effort. When Khamenei won reelection in 1985, he wrote Khomeini a letter detailing his voluminous complaints against Mousavi. Though the letter has never been made public, we can deduce that the complaints were both personal and ideological: He railed against Mousavi's technocratic inclinations and his toleration of artists and intellectuals who were not, in the strict sense, Islamist. But Khamenei's many attempts to rid himself of Mousavi came to naught. Khomeini defended Mousavi. In an implicit attack on Khamenei, Khomeini once declared that Mousavi's critics could not even run a bakery—in other words, what impressed Khomeini most about Mousavi was his management of the economy. But Khomeini was not Mousavi's only champion. The Revolutionary Guard also adored him. His reputation rested on his probity. He organized a system of food rationing that was generally free of corruption. And there was a broad sense that Mousavi resisted the pocket-lining temptation that befell so many of his comrades.

There are two clouds, however, that hover over his years in office. The first is his role in the Iran-Contra affair. Although he didn't greet Oliver North when the Marine arrived in Tehran, allegedly bearing a cake and a bible, Mousavi was in the thick of negotiations with him. According to some accounts, he was one of three top Iranian officials—the others are Rafsanjani and Khamenei—who brokered the deal to trade the release of American hostages in Lebanon in return for the sale of much needed U.S. arms. Working so closely with the Great Satan took its toll on Mousavi's reputation. (While Rafsanjani also paid a price for his role in the affair, Khamenei successfully kept his own role secret.)

By far, the most severe (and most repeated) criticism about Mousavi is his role in the 1988 execution of close to 4,000 members of the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK), a political party that had split with Khomeini and violently opposed him. Most of the slaughtered were simply political prisoners. What role did Mousavi play in this episode? At best, he was ignorant of the event, which is what he recounts. We also have an account of the episode in the memoirs of the recently deceased Ayatollah Montazeri. When Montazeri strenuously objected to the massacre, Khomeini removed him as his designated successor. Montazeri's memoir makes clear that many in the top tier of government—including then-President Ali Khamenei—were unaware of the murders. Moreover, Montazeri's fervent support for Mousavi's presidential campaign enhances the credibility of his claim of ignorance. Still, even if he can be absolved of this crime, he couldn't have survived so long in one of the top positions of this regime without making many other sacrifices of his conscience.

The regime never imagined that Mousavi, with his low-key demeanor, could win.

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With the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989, Mousavi's political career came to an abrupt end. Ali Khamenei became the country's next supreme leader, and, in the constitutional revision that made his ascension possible, he backed a successful campaign to eliminate the role of the prime minister entirely. Exiled from power by the politicians, Mousavi retreated into aesthetics—painting, architecture, serving as president of the national Academy of the Arts.

Of course, it is always difficult, even dangerous, to extract ideological insights from an artist's oeuvre. But, in Iran, art rarely exists within a vacuum. Traditional Islam forbids the reproduction of a human face. Such creation, it believes, must remain the monopoly of Allah. As a result, Islamic art has largely sublimated the aesthetic impulse into formalism—ornate calligraphy, arabesque tiles, and, of course, Persian rugs.

Mousavi's paintings are well within this tradition. They make no effort to represent reality. They consist of simple lines, beguilingly arranged—sometimes in the style of Mondrian, only more muted, and other times resembling the simple, graceful curves of, say, a Persian dome.

His paintings and architecture can be read as a reflection of the man's own soft-spoken tendencies. But what's important is their eclecticism, their openness to an array of influences. In architecture, he is an avid fan of Renzo Piano, the modern-

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Mousavi's architecture shows his deep understanding of the West and modernity.

ist architect who co-designed the famed Pompidou Center in Paris. What Piano did with buildings—expose the structural armature of a building, instead of hiding it behind aesthetic façades—is a sort of transparency that appeals to Mousavi's democratic instincts. In the many buildings he has designed, Mousavi has been as much inspired by elements of the Piano style as the traditional Iranian style. His paintings and buildings, no less than his politics, all point to a man not only well-informed about Western aesthetic modernism and political modernity but willing and able to combine them with native elements.

During his long hiatus from electoral politics, Mousavi deepened the ties he had established with Iran's intellectual elite—from Islamist reformers to secular artists—and these ties intensified his liberal instincts. In 1997, when the emerging reformist camp first tried to mount a presidential campaign, it attempted to draft Mousavi. He did not accept. Some suggest he did not believe Khamenei would allow his candidacy to pass the vetting process in the Guardian Council—a body of twelve men that must approve every candidate that appears on any ballot. Others say that he was blackmailed by conservatives who threatened to publish youthful images of his wife without the Islamic hijab. While he did not become a candidate, he and his wife were close advisers to the ultimate reform candidate and winner, Mohammad Khatami.

The Khatami period was at once an era of great openness and great disappointment. And the fact that the theocracy undermined the country's duly elected president—arresting many of his aides, shuttering sympathetic newspapers, and rejecting as inimical to Islamic sharia nearly every law passed by his supporters in the parliament—highlighted the fundamental hopelessness of working within the system, or, at least, the necessity of radically reforming it. After Khatami left office in 2005 and then watched the Ahmadinejad presidency in horror, he contemplated running for his old job last year. But a Khatami candidacy was a risk that Khamenei was not willing to take. And, as the regime pressured Khatami to pull out of the race, Mousavi stepped in to fill the reformist void. It seems that Khamenei viewed him as an acceptably harmless risk to his rule. With Mousavi's low-key demeanor and long absence from politics, it was hard to imagine him posing much of a threat to Ahmadinejad.

But then, something happened on the way to the polls. With the unprecedented participation of his wife—a novelty in the Islamic regime—and with a simple motto of "every citizen a campaign headquarter," Mousavi unleashed an enthusiastic, Internet-savvy campaign that paralyzed the regime. His performance in televised debates helped win over the uncommitted middle. In one debate, Ahmadinejad wielded a sheet of paper, implying that it contained something incriminating about Zahra Rahnavard, and asked menacingly more than once, "Do you want me to show it?" Eventually, Ahmadinejad did question Rahnavard's academic credentials. Rahnavard responded vehemently to the slanders, proudly defending her scholarly record. Mousavi rallied the support of popular celebrities (from the filmmaker Dariush Mehrjui to soccer players). He harvested the accumulating resentment against the regime's economic incompetence and cultural hooliganism. In one of his campaign films—made by a top secular director—Mousavi declares that, if elected, he would end the days of governance by "soothsayers and palm readers," replacing ignorance and arrogance with experts and reason. This message won the support of not just youth and the women's movement, but also the anemic private sector, which helped underwrite the campaign.

Even more remarkable than his campaign has been his stewardship of the Green Movement that has protested the stolen election. The movement is composed of supporters of nearly every political persuasion—from reformists who just want to restore the regime to its "golden days" to those who want to start anew. Mousavi has had to temper the radicalism of the latter and surmount the conservatism of the former. At the same time, he has been careful not to say anything that could be construed as sedition and land him in jail. Mousavi has managed to maintain his coalition through the use of a broad, simple message. Millions marched around the slogan: "What happened to my vote?"

Through it all, Mousavi has acted with astonishing calm. He has issued 17 statements and given a number of interviews. Reading them as a collection, one can see the arc of his thinking—increasing alienation from the regime and growing dedication to democratic values. In his most recent interview, published last week on his website, *Kalame*, he defiantly, albeit obliquely, compares Khamenei's despotism with that of the Shah. Today's despotism, he declared, is a continuation of royalist despotism. It was a perfect summation of the disappointment felt so deeply by so many of the original revolutionaries.

The regime has tried to make life miserable for Mousavi and his wife. It has arrested his brain trust and forced some to "confess" to egregious crimes. When leaving their home, the couple have been assaulted by regime goons. In the press, they are the subject of a steady campaign of slander that, among other attacks, implies that Mousavi isn't even a Muslim. Sites officially tied to the Revolutionary Guard recently accused Mousavi's wife of "holding in secret the same creed" as Shirin Ebadi, Iran's Nobel laureate. "She is a Zionist Bahai, and has problems with Islam."

Yet, in all of this, the regime has refrained from arresting Mousavi. In an otherwise brutal crackdown, this restraint is an obvious bow to pragmatism. The regime has resisted turning Mousavi into the Nelson Mandela of the movement—a prisoner who would symbolize the regime's horrors, a cause célèbre for world opinion. With his soft voice and modesty, his commitment to non-violence and reason, he's the one martyr that the regime can't afford. ◆

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Roberts versus Roberts

Just how radical is the chief justice?

JEFFREY ROSEN

Last month, the Supreme Court handed down its most polarizing decision since *Bush* v. *Gore*. The 5-4 ruling in *Citizens United* v. *Federal Election Commission* called into question decades of federal campaign finance law and Supreme Court precedents by finding that corporations have a First Amendment right to spend as much money as they want on election campaigns, as long as they don't consult the candidates. It was precisely the kind of divisive and unnecessarily sweeping opinion that Chief Justice John Roberts had once pledged to avoid.

In 2006, at the end of his first term on the Court, Roberts told me and others that he was concerned that his colleagues, in issuing 5-4 opinions divided along predictable lines, were acting more like law professors than members of a collegial court. His goal, he said, was to persuade his fellow justices to converge around narrow, unanimous opinions, as his greatest predecessor, John Marshall, had done. Roberts spoke about the need for justices to show humility when dealing with the First Amendment, adding that, unlike professors writing law review articles, judges should think more about their institutional role. "Yes, you may have another great idea about how to look at the First Amendment," he said, "but, if you don't need to share it to decide this case, then why are you doing it? And what are the consequences of that going to be?"

Since then, Roberts has presided over some narrow, unanimous (or nearly unanimous) rulings and some bitterly divisive ones. And so, it's been hard to tell how seriously he is taking his pledge to lead the Court toward less polarizing decisions. Then came *Citizens United*, by far the clearest test of Roberts's vision. There were any number of ways he could have persuaded his colleagues to rule narrowly; but Roberts rejected these options. He deputized Anthony Kennedy to write one of his characteristically grandiose decisions, challenging the president and Congress at a moment of financial crisis when the influence of money in politics—Louis Brandeis called it "our financial oligarchy"—is the most pressing question of the day. The result was a ruling so inflammatory that the president (appropriately) criticized it during his State of the Union address.

What all this says about the future of the Roberts Court is not encouraging. For the past few years, I've been giving Roberts the benefit of the doubt, hoping that he meant it when he talked about the importance of putting the bipartisan legitimacy of the Court above his own ideological agenda. But, while Roberts talked persuasively about conciliation, it now appears that he is unwilling to cede an inch to liberals in the most polarizing cases. If Roberts continues this approach, the Supreme Court may find itself on a collision course with the Obama administration—precipitating the first full-throttle confrontation between an economically progressive president and a narrow majority of conservative judicial activists since the New Deal.

The first indications that Roberts might not be as conciliatory as he promised came during his second term, which ended in 2007. During his first term, which his colleagues treated as something of a honeymoon, the Court had decided just 13 percent of cases by a 5-4 margin. But, in the next term, that percentage soared to 33 percent. (It would fluctuate up and down a bit over the next two years.) What's more, the 2007 term ended with unusually personal invective, as both liberal and conservative colleagues expressed frustration with Roberts. That year, during the Court's second encounter with the McCain-Feingold campaign finance law (which it would gut in *Citizens United*), Antonin Scalia accused Roberts of "faux judicial restraint," for chipping away at restrictions on corporate speech without overturning them cleanly. Meanwhile, the liberal justices seemed angry that Roberts was refusing to budge from rigid positions in divisive cases. "Of course, I got slightly exercised, and the way I show that is I write seventy-seven-page opinions," Justice Stephen Breyer told me in the summer of 2007, referring to his angry dissent from Roberts's 5-4 decision striking down affirmative action in public school assignments.

That same summer, I asked Justice John Paul Stevens whether Roberts would succeed in his goal of achieving narrow, unanimous opinions. "I don't think so," he replied. "I just think it takes nine people to do that. I think maybe the first few months we all leaned over backward to try to avoid writing separately." In other words, once his first term ended, Roberts faced a choice: In cases he cared intensely about, he could compromise his principles to reach common ground or he could stick to his guns and infuriate his opponents, who would feel they had been played for dupes. On virtually all of the most divisive constitutional topics, from affirmative action to partial-birth abortion, Roberts stuck to his guns.

There were some exceptions. Roberts managed to steer the Court toward narrow, often unanimous opinions in business cases, which now represent 40 percent of the Court's docket. (Though this didn't require him to significantly compromise his views, since most of these cases were decided in a pro-business direction.) And then, there was last term's voting-rights case, in which Roberts wrote an 8-1 decision rejecting a broad constitutional challenge to the Voting Rights Act and instead deciding the case on technical grounds. For those who wanted to believe that Roberts was a genuine conciliator, this was a powerful piece of evidence. Like others, I praised his performance in the case as an act of judicial statesmanship.

But, in retrospect, the ruling may have been less statesmanlike than it appeared. According to a source who was briefed on the deliberations in the case, Anthony Kennedy was initially ready to join Roberts and the other conservatives in issuing a sweeping 5-4 decision, striking down the Voting Rights Act on constitutional grounds. But the four liberal justices threatened to write a strong dissent that would have accused the majority of misconstruing landmark precedents about congressional power. What happened next is unclear, but the most likely possibilities are either that Kennedy got cold feet or that Roberts backed down. The Voting Rights Act survived, but what looked from the outside like an act of judicial statesmanship by Roberts may have in fact been a

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strategic retreat. Moreover, rather than following the principled alternative suggested by David Souter at the oral argument—holding that the people who were challenging the Voting Rights Act had no standing to bring the lawsuit—Roberts opted to rewrite the statute in a way that Congress never intended. That way, Roberts was still able to express his constitutional doubts about the law—as well as his doubts about landmark Supreme Court precedents from the civil rights era, which he mischaracterized and seemed ready to overrule.

The voting-rights case may help explain why Roberts didn't take a similarly conciliatory posture in *Citizens United*. After all, one was certainly available. Just as Roberts had implausibly but strategically held in the voting-rights case that Congress intended to let election districts bail out of federal supervision, he could have held—far more plausibly—in *Citizens United* that Congress never intended to regulate video-on-demand or groups with minimal corporate funding. As with the voting-rights case, judicial creativity could have been justified in the name of judicial restraint.

There is, of course, a charitable explanation for why Roberts took the conciliatory approach in one case but not the other: namely, that he felt the principles involved in *Citizens United* were somehow more important and therefore less amenable to compromise. As he told me in our 2006 interview, he has strong views that he, like his hero John Marshall, is not willing to bargain away. Marshall, Roberts said, "was not going to compromise his principles, and I don't think there's any example of his doing that in his jurisprudence."

But a less charitable explanation for the difference between the two cases is that Roberts didn't compromise on *Citizens United* because, this time, he simply didn't have to. Kennedy was willing to write a sweeping opinion that mischaracterized the landmark precedent *Buckley* v. *Valeo* by suggesting that it was concerned only about quid pro quo corruption rather than less explicit forms of undue influence on the electoral system. (Congress had come to the opposite conclusion in extensive fact-finding that Kennedy ignored.) As Stevens pointed out in his powerful dissent, the opinion is aggressively activist in its willingness to twist and overturn precedents, strike down decades of federal law, and mischaracterize the original understanding of the First Amendment on the rights of corporations. "The only relevant thing that has changed" since the Court's first encounter with McCain-Feingold in 2003, Stevens wrote, "is the composition of this Court"—namely, the arrival of Roberts and Samuel Alito.

Some of Roberts's liberal colleagues have suggested that Roberts is a very nice man but that he doesn't listen to opposing arguments and can't be persuaded to change his mind in controversial cases. If so, he may have thought he could produce a unanimous court by convincing liberals to come around to his side, rather than by meeting them halfway. In the most revealing passage in his concurrence in *Citizens United*, he wrote that "we cannot embrace a narrow ground of decision simply because it is narrow; it must also be right." But the great practitioners of judicial restraint had a very different perspective. "A Constitution is not intended to embody a particular economic theory," Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote in his most famous dissent, in *Lochner* v. *New York*. "It is made for people of fundamentally differing views." Holmes always deferred to the president and Congress in the face of uncertainty. He would never have presumed that he knew the "right" answer in a case where people of good faith could plausibly disagree.

With Roberts apparently content to impose bold decisions on a divided nation on the basis of slim majorities, the question becomes: Is the Court now on the verge of repeating the error it made in the 1930s? Then, another 5-4 conservative majority precipitated a presidential backlash by striking down parts of FDR's New Deal. In January 1937, Roosevelt also criticized the Supreme Court's conservative activism in a State of the Union address. The following month, he introduced his court-packing plan. But, at the end of March—thanks to the famous "switch in time" by swing justice Owen Roberts, the Anthony Kennedy of his day—the Court retreated and began to uphold New Deal laws.

One lesson from the 1930s is that it takes only a handful of flamboyant acts of judicial activism for the Court to be tarred in the public imagination as partisan, even if the justices themselves think they are being moderate and judicious. Although vilified today for their conservative activism, both the Progressive and New Deal-era Courts had nuanced records, upholding more progressive laws than they struck down. As Barry Cushman of the University of Virginia notes, of the 20 cases involving maximum working hours that the Court decided during the Progressive era, there were only two in which the Court struck down the regulations. But those two are the ones that everyone remembers. And, during the New Deal era, Cushman adds, we remember the cases striking down the National Industrial Recovery Act and the first Agricultural Adjustment Act, forgetting that the Court upheld the centerpiece of FDR's monetary policy and, by a vote of 8-1, the Tennessee Valley Authority.

It's hard to imagine a full-scale assault by the Roberts Court on Obama's regulatory agenda because, with the exception of Clarence Thomas, the conservatives on today's Court tend to be pro-business conservatives, rather than libertarian conservatives, and are therefore unlikely to strike down government spending programs (like the bank bailouts and the Troubled Asset Relief Program) that help U.S. business. But it's not hard to imagine the four conservative horsemen, joined by the vacillating Kennedy, reversing other government actions that progressives care about. Later this term, for example, the Court may follow *Citizens United* with another activist decision, striking down the Public Company Accounting Oversight Board (nicknamed "Peek-a-Boo"), which was created to regulate accounting firm auditors in the wake of the Enron and Arthur Andersen scandals. If the Court strikes down Peek-a-Boo, even if the decision is narrow enough not to call into question the constitutionality of the Federal Reserve, it may provoke another sharp rejoinder from Obama that turns progressive rumbling against the Court into full-blown outrage.

It's impossible, at the moment, to tell whether the reaction to *Citizens United* will be the beginning of a torrential backlash or will fade into the ether. But John Roberts is now entering politically hazardous territory. Without being confident either way, I still hope that he has enough political savvy and historical perspective to recognize and avoid the shoals ahead. There's little doubt, however, that the success or failure of his tenure will turn on his ability to align his promises of restraint with the reality of his performance. Roberts may feel just as confident that he knows the "right" answer in cases like Peek-a-Boo as he did in *Citizens United*. But political backlashes are hard to predict, contested constitutional visions can't be successfully imposed by 5-4 majorities, and challenging the president and Congress on matters they care intensely about is a dangerous game. We've seen well-intentioned but unrestrained chief justices overplay their hands in the past—and it always ends badly for the Court. ◆

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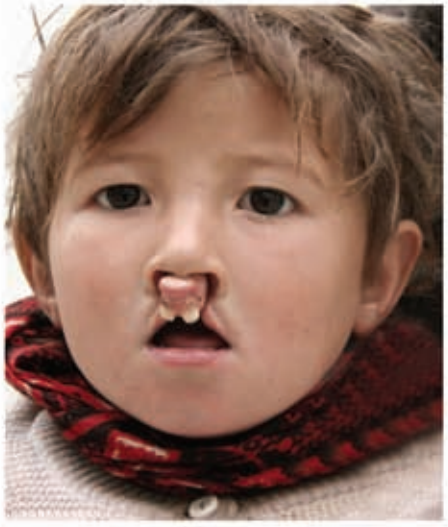

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Shooting Banks

Obama's impotent assault on Wall Street.

PETER BOONE and SIMON JOHNSON

On January 21, in an abrupt change of policy, President Obama announced his intention to take on the big bankers who have brought us so much trouble. "If these folks want a fight, it's a fight I'm ready to have," he said with a clenched jaw at a press conference.

The president's conviction seemed genuine in no small part because at his back, figuratively and literally, the president had Paul Volcker, the former Fed chairman and economic éminence grise. Arguably the most respected man in all of finance—and a lion held at bay (or in a far away office) over the past year by the president's closest advisers—Volcker has devised two simple rules to defang our financial system. First, no bank would be allowed to engage in "proprietary trading," in which it takes risks using its own capital in ways that are completely separate from services provided to clients. Second, there would be a cap on the size of our largest banks, relative to the size of total liabilities in the banking system. "Too big to fail" would finally become "too big to exist."

After a long struggle, it would seem the president has become convinced that our financial sector has grown dangerous and needs to be reined in. It has long been clear that the framework in which bank executives are rewarded for taking huge risks during boom times, and taxpayers are punished for such excesses during bad times, is not sustainable. And now, the hubris of top bankers—spurning audiences with the president and paying themselves huge bonuses, despite White House protests—has finally caught up with them. Even Wall Street cannot moon the giant and get away with it. The course of financial-sector reform is corrected.

Yet, for all of Volcker's good analysis, his presence does not necessarily change anything. To determine if the Obama administration is serious about solving the underlying crisis in finance, we need to get past Volcker's totemic visage and examine the substance of his rules. Burrowing a bit deeper, unfortunately, we find out how little would actually change.

The president is absolutely correct that our priority should be to limit the size of our largest banks and to reduce substantially the risks that can be taken by any financial entity that is backed, implicitly or explicitly, by the federal government. As a result of the crisis and various government rescue efforts, the largest six banks in our economy now have total assets in excess of 63 percent of GDP (based on the latest available data). This is a significant increase from even 2006, when the same banks' assets were around 55 percent of GDP, and a complete transformation compared with the situation in the United States just 15 years ago, when the six largest banks had combined assets of only around 17 percent of GDP. If the status quo persists, we are set up for another round of the boom-bailout-bust cycle that the head of financial stability at the Bank of England now terms a "doom loop."

Unfortunately, the specifics of the so-called Volcker Rules wouldn't address this problem. For one thing, proprietary trading is but a small part of what these banks do. For most of the major banks, such activity accounts for less than 5 percent of total revenue—even at Goldman Sachs, which is, in some senses, the largest hedge fund in the world (backed by the U.S. government through its access to the Fed's discount window), proprietary trading accounts for only around 10 percent of total revenue on average. Even if we could strip this activity from the banks, it would reduce their size only slightly—and the too-big-to-fail banks would find ways to take similar-sized risks because their upside during a boom would still be big, and their downside in a bust would dramatically damage the economy, thereby forcing the government into some sort of rescue.

Implementing the proposed nominal size cap would not make any difference either. The Riegle-Neal Interstate Banking and Branching Efficiency Act of 1994 specified a size cap for banks: No single bank may hold more than 10 percent of total retail deposits. This cap was not related to antitrust concerns, as 10 percent of a national market is too low to imply pricing power. Rather, this was a sensible macro-prudential preventive measure—don't put all of your eggs in one basket. Unfortunately, since 1994, two limitations of Riegle-Neal have become clear: (1) The growth of big banks was not fueled by retail deposits, but rather by various forms of "wholesale" financing (in which financial institutions lend to other financial institutions); (2) The cap was not enforced by lax regulators, so Bank of America, JPMorgan Chase, and Wells Fargo all received waivers in recent years.

Why would 20 years of reckless expansion, a global crisis, and a colossal bailout create "right-sized" banks?

Responding to this failure by limiting the size of individual banks relative to total nominal liabilities of the financial system does not make sense, as this would not be "bubble proof." For example, if housing prices were to increase tenfold, the nominal assets and liabilities of the financial system would presumably also increase markedly relative to the size of the real economy—as was the case in Japan during the 1980s. When the bubble bursts, it is the size of individual banks relative to GDP that is the more robust indicator of the damage caused when that bank fails—hence the degree to which it will be regarded as too big to fail.

Even in the most generous interpretation, the administration is proposing only to freeze the size of our largest banks, not to reduce their scale. The evening after the announcement of the Volcker Rules, when Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner appeared on "NewsHour" and was asked whether the new rules implied that the largest banks would be "broken up" as they divested their proprietary trading operations and complied with the size cap, his response was clear: "No, this does not propose that." And a senior administration official

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explained, "The liability cap will be structured in such a way that it constrains future growth that leads to excessive concentration in our financial system. It's not designed to reduce the share of any existing firm."

Why would anyone regard 20 years of reckless expansion, a massive global crisis, and the most generous bailout in recorded history as the recipe for creating "right-sized" banks? There is absolutely no evidence, for example, that the increase in bank scale since the mid-'90s has brought social benefits. (There are no economies of scale for banks above $100 billion in total assets, but our biggest banks are now in the $800 billion–$2 trillion range—and those figures do not properly account for their holdings of and potential losses on derivatives.) By contrast, the huge social costs are readily apparent—in terms of direct financial rescues, the fiscal stimulus needed to prevent another Great Depression, and the appalling number of lost jobs (eight million gone since December 2007, and still counting). Volcker Rules or no, the president apparently still doesn't get this.

Unfortunately, even if he did, it might not make much difference. The banks understand that if they are large enough and all get into trouble in a roughly similar manner at about the same time, there will be incredibly generous bailouts. When forced to choose between global economic collapse and expensive financial system rescue, they reckon that no government will really let them fail. And they have every basis for this belief—the people who run our mega-banks have, with very few exceptions, kept their jobs, their bonuses, their pensions, and most of their social prestige.

The banks have the power to preserve this arrangement. While the U.S. financial system has a long tradition of functioning well with a relatively large number of banks and other intermediaries, in recent years, it has been transformed into a highly concentrated system for key products. The big four have half of the market for mortgages and two-thirds of the market for credit cards. Five banks have over 95 percent of the market for over-the-counter derivatives. Three U.S. banks have over 40 percent of the *global* market for stock underwriting. This degree of market power brings with it not just antitrust concerns, which this administration has declined to act on, and a huge amount of economic risk—but great political influence as well.

The banks are going to use that power to block legislation containing any meaningful financial reform. And they are likely to succeed. Their current political donations surpass those given by most other interest groups, and the limit on their future donations has just been lifted by the Supreme Court. These banks and their allies are already targeting at least one member of Congress who supported the 2009 credit card bill. Chris Dodd, chairman of the Senate Banking Committee and long-standing champion of the financial sector, recently railed against the big banks for not cooperating with financial reform; but he is freer to speak out now that he is no longer seeking reelection. Senator Richard Shelby, the committee's ranking minority member, is steadfastly opposed to reform; he and other top Republicans eagerly await the arrival of largesse from big banks. Hill staffers remark that the financial Godfathers' message is quite clear: If you cross us, we will bury you at the polls. Nothing in the Volcker Rules would change this relationship between Wall Street and Washington.

It is still possible that the White House could go all-in against the distorted incentives at large banks and the corrupted regulatory structures that have created our "doom loop," and make this the central campaign issue for November. Branding opponents as supporters of too big to fail could get traction, at least if led by an articulate and impassioned president. The gamble would be that pro-reform representatives and senators could swim against the tide of big bank campaign contributions.

But, even here, there is a problem. After the Volcker Rules announcement on January 21, the White House went all out for the reconfirmation of Ben Bernanke. Bernanke did well during the "rescue" phase of the economic crisis—hence the case for reappointing him. But he was also deeply involved in the disastrous regulatory failures and excessively loose credit policies of 2003–2008, at the Fed and in the White House. And, most disconcerting, in his testimony—and even more in his written answers to follow-up questions—he played down the problem of too big to fail, arguing that regulation could prevent the big banks from getting into trouble.

Unfortunately, solutions that depend on smarter, better regulatory supervision and corrective action ignore the political constraints on regulation and the political power of today's large banks. The idea that we can simply regulate huge banks more effectively assumes that regulators will have the incentive to do so, despite everything we know about regulatory capture and political constraints on regulation. It assumes that regulators will be able to identify the excess risks that banks are taking, overcome the banks' arguments that they have appropriate safety mechanisms in place, resist political pressure (from the administration and Congress) to leave the banks alone for the sake of the economy, and impose controversial corrective measures that will be too complicated to defend in public. And, of course, it assumes that important regulatory agencies will not fall into the hands of people like Alan Greenspan (or Ben Bernanke), who believe that government regulation is rendered largely unnecessary by the free market.

Gently backing away from Bernanke—or at least not being so enthusiastic—would have sent a clearer signal that the president is truly prepared to be tough on big banks and their supporters. Unless Bernanke unexpectedly changes his stripes, his reappointment gives up a major hostage to fortune—and to those Democrats and Republicans opposing serious financial reform. Here lies the crux of the problem: The Obama administration lacks an inner core of smart, well-informed advisers who are deeply skeptical of big banks and eager to do whatever it takes to break a cycle that points to financial and fiscal doom. While Paul Volcker's belated ascension from the basement is an encouraging sign, he remains a lone voice in an otherwise inertial regime.

Rahm Emanuel famously said, "You never want to let a serious crisis go to waste." But, as the White House begins to campaign for the November midterms, what has it done differently than any other administration would have? How will it counter anyone who argues, simply and truthfully, that the crisis is over and we wasted it? The Volcker Rules are not the answer. ◆

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ANTHONY RUSSO

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

SEVERAL WORLDS

A Palestinian, Scandar Copti, and an Israeli, Yaron Shani, have co-written, co-directed, and co-edited *Ajami*. This title is the name of a multi-ethnic district in the city of Jaffa, so it fits the film, not merely in facts but in feeling. Copti and Shani knew what they were doing and why they were doing it.

AJAMI
Kino International

THE LAST NEW YORKER
Brink Films

NORTH FACE
Music Box Films

Coincidentally, they prove again that the film medium has made a contribution to social revelation. Obviously documentary and fiction films have long recorded social data in ways that were not previously possible, but film-makers have also developed a genre, a structural approach, that in itself is a beneficence. From dozens of cities all over the world, we have had films built of interwoven strands, all set within one overall area, keyed in interplay, usually contrasting with one another, often tinged with crime, driven with compassionate intent. We quickly sense that *Ajami*, too, is using this form: to bring us new material in a familiar way. A gripping picture in itself, it leaves us feeling experienced in more than its stories.

The intricacies of Ajami lives—and deaths—are present from the start. A fifteen-year-old Arab boy is fixing a tire on a car when drive-by motorcyclists shoot him. He has been killed, we soon learn, by other Arabs, bedouins, because a member of their tribe was injured in a café owned by another family. Worse, the motorcyclists killed the wrong boy, who had just taken over the car from the offending family. An Arab leader is consulted to avoid further trouble, and at a conference between the killers and the others, a financial settlement is reached.

Braided with this account, which is treated as an unsurprising event in Ajami, are the agon of an Israeli policeman whose brother disappeared a few years ago and who learns what happened; complex drug dealings, particularly those of an Arab youth who is trying to earn money to help his hospitalized mother; an Arab frustrated about living with his Jewish girlfriend; and the rupture of romance between an Arab youth and an Arab girl because he is Muslim and she is Christian. There is more. As *Ajami* surges along, the dialogue flits frequently between Arabic and Hebrew, and Arabic flecked with Hebrew, and the subtitles keep us posted as to which is being spoken—or mocked.

No one in the cast is a professional actor except Copti, who plays a drug chief. He and Shani followed the neo-realist practice of finding non-professional people steeped in the milieu, then molding their enthusiasm and commitment into truthful performances. We are told that much of the dialogue was improvised by the cast as they worked.

Of course this process is irrelevant to our viewing of the film. When we first see the granddaddy of neo-realist films, De Sica's *The Bicycle Thief*, we probably don't know—and it doesn't matter—that the cast is non-professional, that De Sica grabbed the boy out of a crowd that was watching him shoot a scene. What matters is the result. Yet this non-pro approach is disturbing. How are these good performances possible? We cannot help wondering how a professional cast could have improved the film. Actors would have spared the directors ten months of preparation, but there is something vaguely anarchic, iconoclastic, about the fact that, ten months or not, these performances could be done at all. And only on film. It is still an art that, in some ways, defies art. The motion-picture camera, whatever shape it may come to take, is still a somewhat frightening hive of mystery.

ANTHONY RUSSO

To another multi-ethnic center. *The Last New Yorker* is actually a daring piece of work. Films too numerous to sample have sported splendid shots of New York; there is at least one coffee-table book of stills of the city taken from Hollywood films. Yet the photographer Harvey Wang, who has made short films, has elected to make his first feature about Manhattan. He had a story and actors, but his apparent prime purpose was to let us see what he sees when he looks around New York. The credited cinematographer is Derek McKane, who certainly must not be snubbed; still, it is hard to think that a photographer directed a film and stayed completely away from the camera.

The screenplay by Adam Forgash is fairly forthright. It virtually admits to being little more than a piece for three actors to fill some time with. We are not much solicited to care one way or another: we just watch two old men—old friends—talk like two old friends. (Multi-ethnic New York? Their names are Lenny Sugarman and Ruben Liebner, and they are played by Dominic Chianese and Dick Latessa.) One of them, who loves New York, falls ridiculously in love with a mature woman, while the other man just wants to move away. We can be pleased that two veteran actors found a 1950s-type television script to appear in, with some effect. But

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the most credible human chord in the picture is struck by Kathleen Chalfant as the woman. Eminent in the theater, Chalfant is not much known in films, and here she shows why that is regrettable.

Still, the star of the picture is the scenery. Wang and McKane eschew grand monumental shots. They are concerned with a city that is lived in—shops, cafés, markets, walkable streets, welcoming avenues—and while their acute color pleases the eye, they imply all along that these buildings are filled with people, and that today, if we listen carefully, we can hear the hum of their lives.

A few months ago a young woman asked me how it feels to live in a city that I have known since I was a child. The question startled me: I had long thought of New York today as greatly different from the place I grew up in. But Wang gave me hints as to how this city has grown out of mine.

In the 1920s Germany produced a series of so-called mountain films, with Alpine settings and lots of climbing. Some of them were documentary, but many were fictional. Leni Riefenstahl began her film career by starring in some of them, which is logical enough for this eventual favorite of Hitler's, since the mountain films celebrated German heroism and ingenuity and fed into the essence of Nazi bravado.

Now comes *North Face*, another German film about mountaineering. In May 1936, the country is looking for national heroes as the Olympics approach. Alpine success seems a good way to find some, especially through the ascent, if possible, of the north face of the Eiger in the Alps, which had already claimed some German lives. A secretary on a Berlin newspaper, Luise Fellner, knows two young men back in the town she came from who are possible candidates for glory. Her paper sends her down there; her boss accompanies her; the two young men finally agree to attempt the climb, as do two Austrians. These matters give Luise a chance to develop her skill in photography. A predictable story develops in the days of preparation and, later, during the attempts. The film's real interest and excitement, naturally enough in two senses, are in the climbing.

I have always loathed mountain climbing. Like auto racing, it seems a sport designed for a viewer who basically wants to see death, and like racing, though through much more difficult stratagems, it finds occasional means to satisfy that viewer. Still, when the camera ascends, the heart almost fibrillates. All the predictable climbing shots in this picture, all the hammering-in of pitons, all the swinging on ropes precariously fastened while the men arch over infinity—it is all simultaneously hateful, silly, unnecessary, and chilling. The screenplay, by Benedikt Roeskau, is based on a true story, all of it familiar enough except the last Alpine scene, which stings.

Yet the hazardous north-facing is less astonishing than the existence of the film itself. Made recently, it is set in Hitler's world. Nazi armbands are worn, Hitler is *heil*ed when people arrive and leave, conversation refers to the pleasant state of the country. *North Face* won several awards lately from the German Film Academy. Don't these facts mark some sort of turning point in acceptance?

Not long ago we had *My Führer*, a German film that made Hitler a buffoon. Presumably it demonstrated that a god had been de-deified. But now a German film presents life under Hitler as calmly as life under Merkel. I am not suggesting that this picture signals the return of fascism in Germany. Rather, it suggests an increase in speed. Everything is faster these days, apparently including the melding of the present into the past, the acceptance of the past as history rather than experience. As I recall, it took about a century before the English theater could accept Napoleon as a romantic figure. Now it needs only sixty years for Germans to accept loyal Nazis simply as people of the past living in accepted ways.

The film-makers have put in one unguent shot at the end. Luise (gently played by Johanna Wokalek) is a postwar photographer in New York and is taking a photograph of a black musician. No permanent Nazi, she.

Postscript. The recent passing of Eric Rohmer brought forth the tributes—the gratitude—that he certainly deserved. His influence on the New Wave as editor and intellectual, the suavity and perception and polish of his films, were all hailed rightly as ornaments of French culture. There is, however, an anomaly in his career for me. My favorite Rohmer, his adaptation of Kleist's *The Marquise of O...*, was made in Germany in German. Usually I am wary of the greasy adjective "great," but I remember that when I first saw this film in 1976, I was overwhelmed by the sense that I was watching the arrival of a great work. Some admirers have said that Rohmer made a Frenchman out of Kleist; still, it seems remarkable that this very French sensibility found its masterwork in Germany. ◆

Dexter Filkins
THE AMERICAN AWAKENING

IN THE GRAVEYARD OF EMPIRES: AMERICA'S WAR IN AFGHANISTAN
By Seth G. Jones
(W. W. Norton, 414 pp., $27.95)

I.

With the war in Afghanistan hanging in the balance, it is useful, if a little sad, to recall just how complete the American-led victory was in the autumn of 2001. By December, the Taliban had vanished from Kabul, Kandahar, and much of the countryside. Afghans celebrated by flinging their turbans and dancing in the streets. They dug up TV sets, wrapped in plastic, from hiding places in their gardens. In Mullah Omar's hometown of Sangesar, the locals broke into his madrassa and tore out the door frames for firewood. Among ordinary Afghans, there was a genuine sense of deliverance. The world, which had abandoned them more than a decade before, was coming back.

What a difference eight years makes. Today the Taliban are fighting more vigorously and in more places than at any point since they fled the capital. They are governing, too, with sharia courts and "shadow" administrators, in large parts of the Pashtun heartland in the south and the east. American soldiers are dying faster than ever: twice as many were killed in 2009 as in 2008. Perhaps most disturbing, the Afghan government of President Hamid Karzai has revealed itself to be a hollow shell, incapable of doing much of anything save rigging elections. The center is giving way.

The catastrophic reversal in Afghanistan has many fathers, but all the many failures can be boiled down to two: a lack of resources, which might have been used to build enduring Afghan institutions; and a conviction, until recently,

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that time was on our side. In the crucial years from 2002 to 2006, as the fledgling Afghan government hobbled along, the Americans—by this I mean officials in the Bush administration in Washington, for the soldiers and the diplomats in the field were perfectly aware of the dangers—carried on without the slightest sense of urgency. In time, the thinking in Washington went, Afghan democracy and the Afghan state would take hold, and the Taliban would wither away.

Today, in the gloomy winter of 2010, American policy has been almost entirely reversed. For the first time since the war began, the White House is devoting its full attention—and the necessary men and matériel—to drive back the Taliban and create an effective Afghan army and state. The thirty thousand new troops being dispatched by President Obama will bring the American total to around 100,000. Obama has also ordered a crash effort to train and equip 400,000 Afghan soldiers and police, in addition to a novel plan to organize tens of thousands of local militiamen. The U.S. military, meanwhile, has learned from its disastrous early mistakes and reinvented itself. In the villages, American soldiers are carrying out a sophisticated strategy that relegates the killing of insurgents to the lowest tier.

And that brings us to the question of time. The most startling line in Obama's speech at West Point in December was its invocation of an eighteen-month timeline for the maximum deployment of American troops. After that, he said, they would begin to come home. The president announced an escalation and a de-escalation in the same speech. You have the resources now, he seemed to say, but your time is short. In the days that followed, his aides qualified the president's pledge—it's "not a cliff, it's a ramp," Jim Jones, the national security advisor, said. And so it probably would be. But the fact remains that with those crucial sentences, Obama bared his intentions, and even his soul. He does not want to be in Afghanistan. His heart is not in it. To be sure, he is proceeding with the escalation, and his heart may yet change, but it is difficult to imagine that the Taliban—and the Pakistanis—have not concluded that the Americans will soon be gone.

After eight years, some Americans may be forgiven for forgetting why the United States went to Afghanistan in the first place. It is important to begin the analysis at the beginning. We invaded Afghanistan following the attacks on September 11, so as to destroy the Taliban and the Al Qaeda leaders and cadres who had taken refuge there. And we succeeded, at least initially. Al Qaeda was all but decapitated. (In December 2001, I walked through several abandoned Al Qaeda safe houses in Kabul.) The Taliban were dead or dispersed. It was the follow-through that proved disastrous.

Seth G. Jones's book provides a vivid sense of just how paltry and misguided the American effort has been. Jones—a scholar at the RAND Corporation and a consultant to the American command in Kabul—chronicles, year by year, the principal American and NATO failures over the course of the war. Reading *In the Graveyard of Empires* is an experience in dramatic irony: you know the glorious beginning, you know the dismal present; so you watch the American-led project in Afghanistan unravel with a tightened stomach and clenched teeth. But if we are ever to redeem the Afghan venture—and the consequences of failure seem catastrophic—*In the Graveyard of Empires* will help to show what might still be done to build something enduring in Afghanistan and finally allow the U.S. to go home.

What Jones demonstrates so persuasively—and what many of Obama's homebound critics have often missed—is that for the past eight years, the trouble in Afghanistan has been less the presence of American and Western troops than their absence. This, and their utter failure to build any sort of institutions that might take their place. It was these two factors, more than any others, that made possible the return of the Taliban. Owing to the pathetic resources devoted to the endeavor, the Americans and NATO were never able to protect the Afghan people—not from crime, not from corrupt officials, not from insurgents. The government and the security forces they built and trained were never able to do it for them. The Taliban, which Jones acutely describes as "a complex adaptive system," brought itself back to life and flowed into the breach.

From the beginning, the Bush administration justified the "light footprint" as a way of not stoking Afghan nationalism—despite the overwhelming evidence that ordinary Afghans thirsted for foreign help in the wake of the Taliban's collapse. Their country, after all, was totally destroyed, with no means of repairing itself. As the Taliban regrouped, the Americans and NATO found themselves mounting operations to clear villages and towns of Taliban fighters, only to leave and watch them return. Then the American and NATO troops would go in again. "Mowing the grass," Jones called it. The result was that ordinary Afghans typically encountered American or NATO troops only during military sweeps. And in the early years those American troops were every bit as heavy-handed as their countrymen in Iraq—and the air strikes they called in were even worse. The result was a deep mistrust of the American and NATO militaries, and a growing unwillingness to confront the Taliban.

But the more shocking sin—the inexcusable one—was the failure to build even the rudiments of an enduring Afghan state, one that could provide security for its people and deliver basic public services such as health care and roads. (It is also worth mentioning, to those hankering for an American withdrawal, that a viable Afghan army and police force would likely be the only thing that could prevent a repeat of the horrific civil war that engulfed the country in 1990s.) A functioning Afghan state, as Jones makes painfully clear, might well have gained the allegiance of the Afghan people, even the Pashtuns in the south. What the Afghans got instead was a pathetic principality in Kabul with virtually no capacity to deliver anything outside the city limits.

The central administration that existed in Kabul quickly evolved into a criminal enterprise, siphoning tens of millions of Western dollars and, later, enriching itself from the booming trade in opium. In the countryside, there was, in effect, no government at all: in the early years officials in the Bush administration were only too happy to turn back to the warlords—almost universally reviled by ordinary Afghans—to provide what governance there was. Faced with anarchy in their villages and corruption in their government, Afghans in the south and the east turned to the Taliban. "In short," Jones remarks, "there was a supply of disgruntled locals because of the collapse of Afghan governance, and a demand for recruits by ideologically motivated insurgent leaders. This combination proved deadly." By and large, ordinary Afghans embraced the Taliban not out of some visceral hatred of Westerners, but because they concluded that they had no other choice.

That last point is crucial, especially now. Measuring public opinion in Afghanistan is tricky, but every recent independent poll attempted there shows widespread support for Western troops. They are certainly more popular than the Taliban. By and large, Afghans reserve their fiercest contempt for their own government, which they regard as incompetent and crooked.

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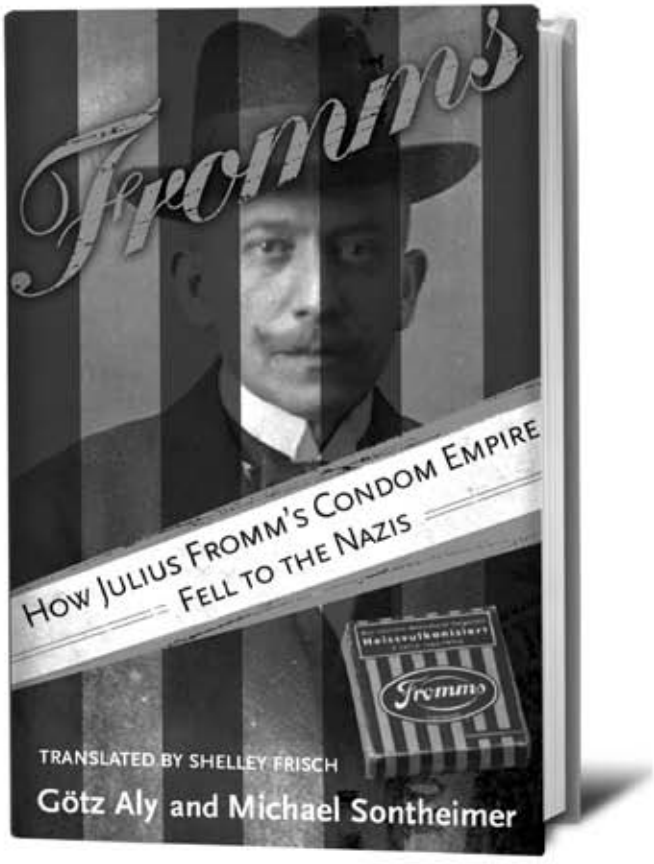
My own recent experience is anecdotal but instructive. Last summer, on a foot patrol with a group of American Marines in Helmand Province, we came to a village named Mian Poshteh, where the locals actually lined up to watch a Taliban ambush, which they knew was on the way. As the Marines worked their way down a trail, a huge homemade bomb, hidden in the sand, exploded. The bomb blew a hundred feet into the air and a dozen Marines disappeared inside the cloud. Miraculously, none of them died; the bomber had pulled his trigger a few seconds too soon. But when the marines ventured to the outskirts of Mian Poshteh and made their inquiries, not a single Afghan would tell them a thing. "Maybe they came at night," a man named Assadullah said with a shrug.

Yet my experience that day in Mian Poshteh was exceptional. Over several days of walking the Helmand River Valley, my best sense was that the locals, more than anything, felt trapped—caught unhappily between the Taliban, whom they feared, and the Americans and the Afghans of Karzai's government, whom they distrusted. And wherever the Americans demonstrated that they intended to stay—and that they intended to help build a government—the Afghans proved remarkably receptive.

A few days after the bomb attack, I sat with a group of Marines under the shade of a eucalyptus tree listening to Gul Jan, the elder in the village of Jan Mohammed Khel. For more than an hour we sat and drank tea while Jan explained his village's predicament. Unlike Mian Poshteh, Jan Mohammed Khel fell within a six-mile-long area secured by the Americans, dubbed the "snake's head" for its oblong shape. In two years, the Americans had raised up a local government, a small police force, and a small base with about three hundred Afghan soldiers. Most important, about three hundred American Marines had hunkered down and stayed there, and in an area small enough that they could control it. The Taliban were still active inside the "snake's head," but security inside the villages improved a lot.

Sitting under the eucalyptus tree, Jan seemed relaxed enough to speak his mind. The story he told was all too sadly believable. "All my life, I have seen destruction," Jan said. The village's single school was burned by the Taliban three years before, he said, and most of the canals had been damaged by fighting. What Jan and the rest of the villagers—about fifty young men sat with us—wanted was peace, and

"Illuminating and fascinating"*


Fromms
How Julius Fromm's Condom Empire Fell to the Nazis
Fromms
TRANSLATED BY SHELLEY FRISCH
Götz Aly and Michael Sontheimer

"Condoms, sex, Judaism, not to mention scandal, salaciousness, and socialism... all chronicled in the new book *Fromms*

...it's hard to deny that Julius Fromm is still a captivating and fascinating footnote in Holocaust history that deserves his own story." — *DAILY BEAST*

"Serious, ironic, sarcastic, with a deep moral outrage that shines through every page, and does not need to be made explicit through sermonizing."

—YEHUDA BAUER, Professor of Holocaust Studies, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem

*"A footnote to the history of the Nazi Reich, illuminating and even fascinating."

—WALTER LAQUEUR, author of *The Last Days of Europe*

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a government that could enforce it. The Taliban, he said, came and went by force, without much enthusiasm from the locals. "They are like shadows," Jan said. "They come in the night, they do their things, and then they are gone."

Jan was unambiguous about his preferences. "If we had security, we could get rid of them," he said of the Taliban. "But how can we fight them? This kind of disease is hard to get rid of." The only people strong enough to expel the Taliban, Jan said, were the Americans. "Our government is very weak. I am sorry to tell you this, but you can't go now. First there must be security, and then you can go." And he added: "You shouldn't stay forever. You have your own country to go to."

Were Jan and the other Afghans like him lying to the Americans to buy themselves a little peace? Maybe. Just two days before, not a mile from Jan's village, an American patrol had been struck by a bomb. At the very least, Jan probably knows people in the Taliban, and maybe even allows them to use his village. Still, my strong impression was that Jan and other Afghans like him—not far away, on yet another foot patrol, an Afghan man had come out of his house to warn the Marines of a pending Taliban ambush—were speaking the truth. In the hour-long conversation with Jan, neither he nor any of the other Afghan men who gathered to speak with me exhibited the slightest trace of hostility or fear.

What does such an encounter mean for the United States and its NATO allies? It means, for one thing, that many Afghans, even in the worst places, are still receptive to their presence. It means that the Afghans' ultimate allegiance is probably still up for grabs. It means that the U.S. and NATO forces are not, in most places, regarded as an occupying army. And it means that if the Americans and NATO practice their counterinsurgency strategy as well as they preach it—that is, if they make protecting the Afghan people their overriding objective—then they have a chance to begin isolating the Taliban from the villages where they operate.

II.

That is the good news. The bad news is that isolating the Taliban and wooing ordinary Afghans may be the easiest task that confronts the United States and its allies. The rest is immeasurably harder.

In the villages along the Helmand River, the principal challenge that awaits the Americans is as clear as the empty winter sky. There are no Afghan institutions—not the army, not the police, not the government—that could take over if the United States and its allies decided to leave. In Mian Poshteh, a scattering of mud huts and cornfields, there were no schools, no paved roads, no police, no electricity, no running water, and only a handful of Afghan soldiers. In this regard, Mian Poshteh is not exceptional in any way.

There is, of course, a central government in Kabul. And what a government it is! Its reach extends outside the capital in only the most notional way. In some of the contested provinces, there is little more than a skeletal administration: a governor, whose life and livelihood is guarded by NATO or Afghan troops, and a handful of terrified Afghans around him. That is pretty much it. In the districts, there is, at least in theory, a local administrator—appointed by the provincial governor, who is appointed by Karzai—but in contested areas such as the provinces of Helmand and Kandahar and Khost, there is often not even that.

And then there is the army and police. There are currently about ninety thousand of each. This is a woefully inadequate number. (Iraq, with a smaller population, has security forces that number about 600,000.) When you consider that an Afghan army and police force are the only things that would ultimately allow the United States to leave here in a good way, it makes you wonder what on earth the Bush administration was doing for the past eight years. President Obama has promised to expand their numbers to at least 400,000, but the more worrisome issue is not their number but their quality.

For the Afghan security forces really are in a sorry state. Eight years into the war, the Afghan army and police have shown themselves willing to fight, but incapable of much more than that: maintaining themselves in the field, mounting operations at night, operating weapons more complicated than a rifle. Even after years of training, the skills and the literacy levels necessary to administer forces in the field have failed to materialize. When it comes to paying, feeding, and supplying soldiers, and tracking who is on leave and who is injured, most Afghan units perform miserably. These tasks are almost always performed by American or NATO soldiers.

Last year, Major General Richard Formica, who was then overseeing the training of the Afghan security forces, spoke to me about the difficulties of creating an army in a country where only one in four adults is literate. "What percentage of police recruits can read?" Formica asked when we met at his headquarters in Kabul. "When I was down in Helmand, where the Brits were training police officers, they said not only could none of them read but they didn't understand what a classroom was. How can you train officers if they can't write arrest reports?"

And then there is Karzai's government in Kabul. On most days, it shows itself to be a spectacularly corrupt institution, existing for little more than its own enrichment. The evidence of its corruption is everywhere. Provincial police chief jobs cost as much as $50,000, with the idea being that the investment will more than pay for itself. The bloated mansions in the Kabul neighborhood called Sherpur, with their dozen-plus bedrooms, sell for millions of dollars each—this in one of the world's poorest countries—and some of them are occupied by current and former officials in Karzai's government.

There appear to be few transactions in public life that have not been overwhelmed by graft. Stand outside the municipal courthouse in Kabul, as I did, and you can talk to any number of people who will tell you about their recent purchases: hearings, judges, verdicts, settlements. At the checkpoints that mark virtually every traffic intersection in the capital, the police regularly demand bribes to let drivers through. It is not uncommon for drivers taking their trucks through the city to fork over money at two dozen posts. I paid a bribe just to walk inside Kabul International Airport.

And then, of course, there was August's presidential election. By the cautious estimates of international observers, Karzai's supporters—that is, his government and the election workers under his command—falsified nearly a million ballots on his behalf. The vote-stealing was astonishingly brazen. In the Shorabak region of Kandahar Province, Karzai loyalists detained the district governor (whom I interviewed) and effectively cancelled the election. Inside Shorabak's local government office, Karzai supporters—otherwise known as election workers—falsified 23,900 ballots and sent them to Kabul. Every one of them was a vote for Karzai.

Much of the vote-stealing appears to have been orchestrated by Ahmed Wali Karzai, the president's brother, who wields power over southern Afghanistan like one of Coppola's godfathers. (It was on his orders that the district governor of Shorabak was detained, I was told.) American officials believe that Ahmed Wali Karzai is deeply involved in the opium trade, which is one of the economic engines of the Taliban. American diplomats and generals

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have pushed President Karzai to remove him, but so far Karzai has refused.

As the corruption in the Karzai government has grown more blatant, a popular hypothesis has emerged to explain it: that officials in Karzai's government orchestrated the fraud in order to preserve their hold on the moneymaking apparatus that the government has become. "It's a moneymaking machine," one senior American official told me. How do you reform something like this?

Since 2001, President Karzai and his cohorts have known only too well that they have the Americans over a barrel. No matter how hard the Americans pushed him, Karzai could figure, they were not going to leave. In any event, they were never going to do anything that would substantially weaken Karzai himself. And so, in fact, they have not. The Americans have threatened Karzai and cajoled him, and Karzai has laughed behind their backs. Just after the election, the American ambassador, Karl Eikenberry, reportedly went to Karzai and demanded that his brother be sent away from Kandahar. Even this request Karzai refused.

This brings us to President Obama's eighteen-month deadline for U.S. military involvement in Afghanistan. The president obviously was thinking politically: he intended to reassure American voters that his commitment to Afghanistan was not foolishly open-ended. But Obama was also conveying a message to Karzai. With that rather short deadline, Obama seemed to be calling Karzai's bluff. You don't think we'll leave? Just watch. The trouble with Obama's deadline is that, in crucial ways, it appears to be at war with itself. If the intent of the president's message was to convey to the American people that the end was in sight, then it was almost certainly untrue. In all likelihood, the end of America's involvement in Afghanistan is not in sight. Constructing an Afghan state that can stand on its own—an army and a police force, at the very least—will take many years. It will certainly take longer than eighteen months. Obama no doubt recognizes this. But the real trouble with Obama's speech was not its message to the American people, but its message to the Taliban. Can the insurgents really be turned that quickly?

III.

Around the U.S. military's headquarters in downtown Kabul, it is commonplace to hear that Afghanistan, whatever else it is, is not Iraq. Everything here, it is said over and over, is different: the people, the terrain, the language, the insurgency. So it is. And yet at the same time you can sense a yearning among many officers here that, if we are lucky, Afghanistan may turn out to be like Iraq after all.

It may seem odd to place your hopes for winning in Afghanistan on what transpired over the past seven years in Iraq. The latter, of course, was a bloody catastrophe, at least in the first four years. By late 2006, the American invasion had midwifed the implosion of an entire society, a civil war, and a seemingly hopeless military quagmire. But the incontrovertible fact is that then the war turned. To anyone who spent time in Iraq during the nightmare years, the idea that Iraq was headed for anything other than a total disintegration—and the region for a wider war—would have been regarded as fanciful. But for a variety of reasons, not the least of which was luck, the Americans reeled Iraq back in. The bloody streets went pretty still. And despite predictions to the contrary, the relative calm that took hold in late 2007 has largely held. The worst has been avoided.

There is no question that the military's best officers feel humbled by the calamities of Iraq. It is also true that those same officers learned from their mistakes—and that their learning curve helped to pull Iraq back from the abyss. There are not many institutions left in American life that seem capable of such growth, or of such character. And whatever the senior officers are saying, they appear to be banking that a similar set of dynamics will rescue them in Afghanistan. The biggest lesson, as General McChrystal himself told me, was never to give up: "One of the big takeaways from Iraq was that you have to not lose confidence in what you are doing. We were able to go to the edge of the abyss without losing hope."

In Iraq a whole array of things turned, and at the just the right time. Al Qaeda overreached, finally pushing ordinary Sunnis—even insurgents—to open revolt. The training of the Iraqi army and police finally started to jell. The widespread ethnic cleansing of Iraq's cities, principally Baghdad, made the Sunnis fearful of a genocide and easier, in their enclaves, to defend. Iraq's Shia majority recognized that unchallenged power was within its grasp if the Americans could be persuaded to leave. And of course there was the surge.

Two of these phenomena are particularly relevant to the Afghan war: the surge and the Awakening. The Afghan version of the surge was announced by Obama last December. And for all the talk of counterinsurgency, the real hope, clearly, is that the fresh infusion of troops will be able to bleed the Taliban enough to force them to consider some sort of political settlement. This is really the heart of the matter. But how likely is it? Over the course of the past several months, there have been intensifying efforts to reach out to Taliban senior leaders like Mullah Omar. These talks, so far as I can tell, do not appear to have gotten much traction. The Americans insist that Omar disavow Al Qaeda, while the Taliban insist that the Americans leave, or at least set a timetable to leave. Theoretically, at least, it is possible to imagine the basis of a deal based on those positions, particularly if Obama is already intending some sort of drawdown.

But there is the time paradox again. With an eighteen-month deadline looming, what incentive does the Taliban have to make a deal? If you read the movement's regular Internet communiqués, you will see that their morale is not that of an army on the brink of defeat. "With their own hands the Americans made the people of Helmand stand with the holy warriors, and all of them have entered the trenches of resistance to seek vengeance and jihad," a recent Taliban missive proclaimed. "This will bear no fruit except the enemy's defeat, Allah willing." It appears the Taliban wholly expect the Americans to run out of will.

It is here, perhaps, that the experience in Iraq merges with the hope in Afghanistan. In a slightly different way, the Americans are attempting to replicate not just the surge but also the Awakening, the Sunni tribal revolt against Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia. They intend to make deals not with the top of the insurgency, but with the bottom. Beginning in late 2006, American officers and intelligence agents, by cutting deals with tribal leaders, effectively removed thousands of insurgents from the battlefield. Many of them—thirty thousand in all—were put on the American payroll. All of them turned on Al Qaeda.

No one in Kabul really believes that they will be able to produce results as dramatic as those that unfolded in the Awakening in Iraq. In Afghanistan, the old tribal hierarchies are nowhere near as coherent as they are in Iraq. Thirty years of war and Taliban cooptation (in some cases subtle, in some cases brutal) has made it far less likely that the insurgents can be separated from the rest of Afghan society. Afghanistan is a deeply atomized place. It is this fragmentation, more than any other factor, that makes any sort of broad-based settlement difficult to imagine.

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Where does that leave the Americans? As one senior American official told me recently, "We are trying everything—and its opposite." But in fact things are not that desperate. Basically, the Americans are hoping they can begin peeling off individual Taliban commanders at the bottom of the food chain, offering them jobs and security if they come along. And they are hoping to hire tens of thousands of local militiamen to defend their own communities. (Ideally, these two initiatives will complement each other.) Over time, the thinking goes, these initiatives could amount to a political settlement, if informal and piecemeal. And things might even go further. It is not inconceivable that the Afghan government could strike deals with Taliban "shadow governors" who are now in effective control of several areas in the south and the east. That would begin to look very much like the Awakening.

But all this is not very likely, at least not yet. The Taliban would have to be substantially weakened, and the government in Kabul substantially strengthened, for anything like this to take hold in more than a few areas. The Iraq analogy is useful again. There the military hung in, and got it right, and also got lucky. In some ways, really, they got a miracle. But strategies and policies generally do not deliver miracles. Can we expect a miracle in Afghanistan? Of course not. But it may take a miracle for us, and Afghanistan, to win. ◆

David Rohde

TERRORISTS WITHOUT BORDERS

DECODING THE NEW TALIBAN: INSIGHTS FROM THE AFGHAN FIELD
Edited by Antonio Giustozzi
(Columbia University Press, 318 pp., $40)

MY LIFE WITH THE TALIBAN
By Abdul Salam Zaeef
Edited by Alex Strick van Linschoten and Felix Kuehn
(Columbia University Press, 331 pp., $29.95)

After several hours of driving down one of the two-lane asphalt roads that wind through Pakistan's tribal areas, our kidnappers entered the territory of Baitullah Mehsud, the widely feared leader of the Pakistani Taliban. It was the middle of March in 2009. We had feared that our kidnappers—Afghan Taliban who had abducted us outside Kabul four months earlier—would sell us to the Pakistani group. But instead our car pulled into the parking lot of a large government building or school in the town of Makeen, in South Waziristan. The Pakistani Taliban politely ushered my Afghan Taliban guards, myself, and the Afghan journalist and driver who had been kidnapped with me, into a back room. There they fed us tea, rice, and bread for dinner. Then they transported us to an empty house nearby, which would serve as our new prison.

Over the next several days, it became clear to me that our Afghan Taliban abductors had not sold us to the Pakistani Taliban. Instead the two groups were working seamlessly together. When we departed from the area six weeks later for unknown reasons, the coordination between the Afghan Taliban and the Pakistani Taliban was equally flawless. Throughout our captivity, Afghan and Pakistani militants spoke in one voice of their desire to topple the American-backed governments in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and halt what they saw as the oppression of Muslims worldwide.

By itself, this anecdote is not significant. But its central lesson—that the tribal areas of Pakistan serve as a fulcrum where Afghan, Pakistani, Arab, and Uzbek militants work together in a broadbased ideological movement—is affirmed by these two new books. *Decoding the New Taliban* is a valuable collection of scholarly and journalistic analyses, and *My Life With the Taliban* is the autobiography of a former senior Taliban official. Both books offer important clues that could help to answer some of the most pressing foreign policy questions now confronting the Obama administration. Who are the Taliban? And can they be defeated, or convinced to lay down their arms?

In their very different ways, both books demonstrate that the Afghan Taliban have become significantly stronger, broader, and more sophisticated since they were toppled in 2001. They also suggest that the Afghan Taliban leadership is increasingly confident, as its military successes multiply and it continues to enjoy safe havens in Pakistan. And the books leave the reader to conclude that hard-line Afghan Taliban are unlikely to agree to a negotiated peace settlement, unless the surge of thirty thousand additional American troops in Afghanistan coincides with a serious military or political drive by the Pakistani government to pressure the Afghan Taliban on the Pakistani side of the border.

While American troops are on their way to Afghanistan, however, Pakistani military officials are refusing to confront the Afghan Taliban inside their borders. For years, Pakistani officials have differentiated between Afghan and Pakistani Taliban groups, insisting that Afghan militants pose no threat to the Pakistani state. They also say that they hope to use the Afghan Taliban as proxies to prevent attempts by India to gain influence in Afghanistan after the Obama administration begins withdrawing American troops from Afghanistan in 2011. As long as they persist in this view, it appears that the Afghan Taliban will continue to enjoy a sanctuary in Pakistan. In January, Pakistani officials rebuffed a request from Defense Secretary Robert Gates that Pakistan launch a military offensive in North Waziristan. The area, which is dominated by an Afghan Taliban faction known as the Haqqani network, is one of the last major Taliban strongholds in the tribal area.

These books suggest—as does as my own experience in captivity—that the Pakistani differentiation between the two Talibans is false. The Afghan and Pakistani Taliban work closely together, strengthening and supporting each other in various ways. For this reason, the American surge in Afghanistan appears unlikely to achieve a military victory until the Pakistanis themselves move more aggressively against the Afghan Taliban. From its Pakistani base, the Haqqani network has carried out a series of high-profile attacks in Kabul, including a recent attack on the Central Bank that paralyzed the city. As long as the Haqqanis remain unchallenged in Pakistan, American and Afghan security forces will have a very hard time containing them—let alone defeating them.

These books are welcome additions to the rather limited number of studies of the Taliban that scholars, journalists, and regional experts have so far produced. They will help to correct an imbalance in the American focus:

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so far, Iraqi insurgents have been the subject of more American study and analysis than Afghan insurgents. Antonio Giustozzi's compilation of essays, articles, and research papers by Western and Afghan experts and Abdul Salam Zaeef's memoir both help to explain the militant group that is killing young Americans and Afghans at a spiraling rate. They paint a disturbing portrait of how a seemingly archaic and unpopular religious movement managed to regain control of vast swaths of Afghanistan, and may still deliver a serious blow to Barack Obama's presidency. Giustozzi's compilation should be read by all experts—and concerned citizens—trying to understand the Taliban.

The scholars in this volume have their work cut out for them: they, too, are struggling to penetrate the Taliban's secretive and reclusive leadership structure. They examine the Taliban's emergence and behavior in different parts of the country. They show that the Taliban are a loosely affiliated confederation of insurgent groups, not a Western-style hierarchical military organization. The Taliban operate a "franchise" system, in which top leaders based in Pakistan issue broad directives, but most Taliban activities remain controlled by local commanders.

Zaeef's memoir offers valuable insight into the Taliban's worldview. Imprisoned for three years in Guantánamo Bay and now living in Kabul, Zaeef is considered a relatively moderate Taliban. But still he rails virulently against the United States, accusing it of unfairly invading Afghanistan in 2001 and wantonly killing 25,000 Afghans in aerial bombardments. (While several thousand Afghan civilians have probably been killed in NATO and American air raids, the figure of 25,000 seems grossly exaggerated.) And he sheds very little light on how the Taliban leadership functions. He never addresses the Taliban's role in allowing Al Qaeda to plan and carry out the terrorist attacks in the United States in 2001.

I should add that my own effort to decipher the group failed catastrophically. An attempt to interview a Taliban commander outside Kabul in November 2008 resulted in myself, an Afghan journalist I was working with, and our driver, being taken hostage. The commander who invited us to the interview abducted us, moved us across several hundred miles of Afghanistan, and brought us into the tribal areas of Pakistan. We spent seven months in captivity—primarily in North Waziristan. The Afghan journalist and I escaped in June 2009. The driver returned home five weeks later.

The struggle to interpret Afghan insurgent groups accurately is nothing new. Outsiders have tried to explain their dynamics for centuries. Most have achieved only mixed results. Serious American attempts to understand Afghanistan have been intermittent and short-lived. Leon B. Poullada, an American diplomat who served in Afghanistan in the late 1950s and wrote a history of Afghan-American relations, referred to the American tendency to pay little attention to Afghanistan as the "Afghan blind-spot." Poullada argued that American policymakers and the American public dismissed the country as hostile and hapless, and repeatedly failed to see its strategic importance. "They imagine something bizarre, outlandish, not really relevant to American life," Poullada observed. "This feeling of unreality, of an inability to focus or define American interests in this 'far-off' land will appear as a recurring theme, and will help to explain the many inconsistencies of American diplomacy in Afghanistan."

Poullada blamed the faulty American understanding on early American writings about Afghanistan. Others argue that the problem is deeper: that the country is indeed as conservative and xenophobic and impenetrable as it has been portrayed. Americans, like other foreigners, have tried hard to grasp it. The American experience in Afghanistan began in 1828, when Josiah Harlan, a West Point graduate and quixotic mercenary from Pennsylvania, became the first American to enter Afghanistan. (Ben Macintyre has written a fine book about him.)

Three years earlier Harlan had journeyed to South Asia, after his fiancée broke off their engagement. Over the next sixteen years, he carried out an astonishing run of opportunism and skullduggery. Posing first as a surgeon, Harlan joined the army of the British-controlled East India Company. Using techniques that he had apparently learned from his brother, who was in fact a doctor, and from medical textbooks, he faked his medical knowledge through the Anglo-Burmese War of 1825.

Honorably discharged, he journeyed to India and became a military adviser to Shujah Shah, a deposed Afghan king then living under British protection. In 1828, posing this time as a dervish, Harlan entered Kabul and served as a spy for Shujah Shah. Returning to India, he switched allegiances many times and ended up as a military adviser to Dost Muhammad, Afghanistan's ruler. Harlan claimed that he created the first Afghan artillery units and led Dost Muhammad's troops to numerous victories. Most spectacularly, he said that he led an entire division of Afghan troops—and a heavy artillery train—over the Hindu Kush range, the forbidding mountains that separate northern and southern Afghanistan. Standing astride a 12,500-foot mountain pass, he ordered his men to fire a twenty-six-gun salute as he unfurled an American flag. "I surmounted the Indian Caucases, and there upon the mountain heights unfurled my country's banner to the breeze," he wrote grandiloquently. "The star-spangled banner gracefully waved for the first time in history amidst the icy peaks and soilless, rugged rocks of a sterile region, seemingly sacred to the solitude of undisturbed eternity."

During the same campaign in 1838, Harlan claimed to have defeated several Hazara chiefs. He reported that one Hazara leader declared him the "Prince of Ghoree" and all his descendents members of the royal family. Several months later, a British army installed Shujah Shah, Harlan's former champion, in power and ousted the upstart American, who fancied himself heir to Alexander the Great. Harlan returned to the United States and published a memoir of his exploits in Afghanistan and India. His efforts to introduce the camel as an alternative means of transportation for the U.S. Army failed. A plan to convince the government to import grapes from Afghanistan also failed. Harlan died in San Francisco in 1871. Twenty years later, his Afghan exploits would become the basis for Kipling's *The Man Who Would Be King*.

Poullada questioned the accuracy of Harlan's memoirs, and maintained that he was the first in a long line of American writers who egregiously portrayed the Afghans as savages. "Harlan's exaggerated and somewhat arrogant account of the intrigues, treacheries, assassinations, poisonings, constant turmoil and warfare in Afghanistan set the pattern for

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American writings of this kind," Poullada wrote, "which resulted in the distorted American view of Afghanistan."

In Harlan's defense, the next American known to have lived in Afghanistan for an extended period also portrayed it as exceedingly forbidding. In 1911, a British firm hired an American engineer named A. C. Jewett to help build a power plant for the royal palace and other buildings. His two-year assignment in Afghanistan dragged on to seven years, as he struggled with "physical difficulties, bureaucratic delays, [and] cultural obstacles" before he could complete the plant. "Jewett soon discovered what later generations of aid providers did," Poullada wrote, "that it is not easy to help Afghans."

In 1909 and 1921, *National Geographic* ran two stories on Afghanistan. Both were negative. "The 'Keep out' sign is still up. Today, the foreigner is no more welcome in Afghanistan than he was a hundred years ago," wrote Frederick Simpich, who went on to compare Afghanistan to Tibet. "Lhasa is no more exclusive than brooding, suspicious Kabul, the capital of this isolated, unfriendly realm of fanatic tribes, of rocks, deserts, irrigated valleys, and towering unsurveyed ranges." And in 1922, Lowell Thomas, the famed American journalist, drove from British-controlled India to Kabul, and wrote a book about his experience called *Beyond Khyber Pass: Into Forbidden Afghanistan*. Thomas caricatured the Pashtuns, the ethnic group that straddled India and Afghanistan: "They obey neither God nor man. Their only law is the law of the rifle and the knife. More elusive than the robber bands of Albania, more daring than the Moros of Mindanao, more cunning than the Yaquis of Sonora, even more savage than the Mongol bandits of Chinese Tibet are the brigand sons of Benjamin."

Thomas's work—like that of many Americans—echoed the views of Afghanistan expressed by British writers. In 1897, an ambitious young British officer named Winston Churchill gained a position in a British expeditionary force dispatched to punish rebellious Pashtun tribes in the Malakand area by agreeing to serve as a journalist. The result was *The Story of the Malakand Field Force: An Episode of Frontier War*. Littered with openly racist statements, the book catapulted Churchill to fame. "Every man's hand is against the other, and all against the stranger," Churchill wrote about the Pashtun tribes. "To the ferocity of the Zulu are added the craft of the Redskin and the marksmanship of the Boer."

In hindsight, Poullada's more hopeful view of the country seems rather similar to that of many foreign visitors to Kabul and other Afghan cities. They found an urban and educated Afghan elite that was eager to create a modern and moderate society. In many ways, Afghan history has been a cycle of Kabul-based reform movements (royalist, communist, or the current American-backed effort) provoking violent opposition from the country's conservative rural tribes. The desire for change among Afghans in Kabul and other cities was genuine and widespread when I covered the fall of the Taliban in 2001. The failure of that reform effort and the return of the Taliban will be studied by historians and strategists for years to come.

The new studies of Afghanistan are vastly more knowledgeable than the writing that angered Poullada, but they grapple with the same contradictions. They, too, are struck by the ability of a ruthless rural insurgency to thwart reform efforts. In different ways in different provinces, the Taliban have shown a remarkable ability to use new tactics (suicide bombing) and new technology (the Internet) to their advantage.

In her essay, "Reading the Taliban," in the Giustozzi volume, Joanna Nathan marvels at the Taliban's haphazard, yet sophisticated and extremely effective p.r. strategy. A movement that seemed to reject modernity in the 1990s is now adept at using technology to monitor its enemy, disseminate its message, and shape its image. One Taliban commander operating just south of Kabul in Wardak Province, for example, recognized the publicity value of carrying out attacks near Kabul. "Being near Kabul allows the news and military events that happen here to reach all the international media outlets," he told *Al Somood*, the Taliban's official magazine, in 2008. "For instance, when we destroyed 54 logistics vehicles in July, local and international journalists rushed to report the event."

Radio Netherlands reported in 2007 that Taliban commanders discussed an interview with a Dutch commander in the southern province of Oruzgan over their walkie-talkies a mere hour after it had been broadcast. Nathan surmises that the supporters of the group are closely monitoring international reporting on the Taliban and relaying it to the group's ground commanders. By late 2008, the Taliban had even begun producing propaganda videos in English. Their use of idioms and colloquialisms was so professional that native speakers may have been involved in the Taliban propaganda effort. My own captors showed the same unexpected dexterity with technology. They looked up information online and then twisted it to serve their purposes. The Taliban knew about the American sea captain kidnapped off Somalia last spring. But they insisted that snipers had not shot dead the pirates. Instead, they claimed—falsely—that the American government had secretly paid a $25 million ransom and told me they expected the same in my case.

At the same time, the Taliban and their cause have moved effortlessly across national, ethnic, and tribal boundaries. Claudio Franco describes how Pakistan's tribal areas have served as a base for the Taliban's resurgence in Afghanistan and in Pakistan. In December 2007, the Taliban commander Baitullah Mehsud was able to create an alliance of Pakistani jihadi groups, which ranged from Sunni hard-liners eager to kill Shia, to Punjabi militants eager to kill Indian forces in Kashmir, to Pashtuns eager to topple American-backed leaders in Kabul and Islamabad. Mehsud, who was killed in an American drone strike in August 2008, blocked Pakistani government efforts to split the Pakistani Taliban along tribal lines.

"Baitullah's masterstroke was his involvement in the creation of the TTP in December 2007," Franco writes, using the acronym for the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, or Taliban Movement of Pakistan. "Treating the FATA [Federally Administered Tribal Areas] like a section of the Muslim Ummah, and tribals as a single community of believers, the brains behind the TTP were able to introduce a mutual assistance mechanism designed to break the government's strategy."

Franco writes that the Pakistani and Afghan Taliban both operate under a loose Taliban command structure headed by the longtime Afghan Taliban commander Mullah Omar. Broad directives are issued by Mullah Omar, but local Taliban ground commanders in both countries carry out local operations as they see fit. He concludes that the Pakistani Taliban and Afghan Taliban are wings of the same broad Taliban movement. "The Afghan Taliban never appear as an external actor," he writes. "They direct the Pakistanis as if they were another of their regional Wilayat, or governorates."

Pakistani Taliban leaders themselves confirmed their close relationship with the Afghan Taliban. Asked in 2008 if the Pakistani Taliban were close to the Afghan Taliban, Faquir Mohammed, the deputy commander of the Pakistani group, replied "No questions about it." And he added: "They are the true Mus-

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lims. We are their staunch supporters and there is no difference in our beliefs." Mawlawi Omar, a spokesman for the Pakistani Taliban, went a step farther and stated flatly in an interview that "there is no difference between Al Qaeda and the Taliban. Those fighting in foreign countries are called Al Qaeda while those fighting in Afghanistan and Pakistan are called Taliban. In fact, both are the name of one ideology. The aim and objectives of both organizations is the same." Franco argues that they should be taken at their word.

Today's Taliban movement—both its Afghan and Pakistani wings—has become Pakistan's Frankenstein. It is the result of years of missteps by American, Saudi and Pakistani governments, which have been well chronicled by Pakistan and American experts. At the behest of the United States, the Directorate of Inter-Services Intelligence, or ISI, Pakistan's premier military intelligence service, helped to inculcate a culture of militant Islam among young Afghans and Pakistanis during the anti-Soviet jihad of the 1980s. With the support of American and Saudi intelligence agencies, Arab militants joined the fight as well.

Following the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan in 1989, however, the United States largely ignored the region. During the 1990s, the ISI had a different strategic objective for its Islamic militants: it used them to counter India. They backed the Afghan Taliban as Pakistani proxies who could prevent India from gaining influence in Afghanistan. At the same time, the ISI supported militant groups that dispatched young Islamists to fight Indian forces in Kashmir.

Following the American invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Omar retreated to the Pakistani city of Quetta, which is located in Baluchistan province several hundred miles south of the tribal areas. From there, he began slowly resurrecting the Afghan Taliban movement. At the same time, Afghan, Uzbek, and Arab militants fled to the tribal areas. The militants began slowly reorganizing themselves in South Waziristan. Paying two to three times the impoverished area's normal rates, the Uzbeks and the Arabs began renting compounds from local tribesmen who sympathized with their cause or were in search of money and security. Surrounded by high mud-brick walls, the compounds were oases of privacy and protection for conservative Pashtun tribesmen. The high walls prevented strangers from seeing—and dishonoring—Pashtun women, and sheltered families from attacks by rival clans.

The presence of foreigners in North and South Waziristan was certainly nothing new. In the 1980s, hundreds of Arab and foreign fighters funded by the United States used the tribal areas as a staging ground for cross-border attacks on Soviet forces in Afghanistan. During and after the anti-Soviet jihad in the 1980s, dozens of Arabs and Uzbeks married local women and settled in the tribal areas. In 2002, local tribesmen in South Waziristan who had fought alongside the Taliban in Afghanistan were aiding the foreigners. And in neighboring North Waziristan, the same dynamic emerged: Jalaluddin Haqqani (the Afghan Taliban tribal leader whose sons would later kidnap me) protected Arabs as well. Jihadism in Pakistan's tribal areas is an international movement.

In Washington, meanwhile, divisions over U.S. policy toward the tribal areas simmered for years. In October 2003, at a White House principals meeting, Zalmay Khalilzad, the newly appointed American ambassador to Afghanistan, and General John Vines, the chief American military commander in Afghanistan, argued that the tribal areas had become a major safe haven for the Taliban. But officials at the State Department and the CIA opposed pressuring Musharraf. They argued that pushing for more from Musharraf, who was the first Pakistani leader to deploy troops to the tribal areas, could topple his government and lead to the end of Pakistani arrests of Al Qaeda leaders in the country's cities.

Senior American officials—including apparently President Bush—believed in Musharraf's commitment to the war on terrorism. They continued to back a loosely monitored billion-dollar-a-year reimbursement program whereby the United States paid fuel, ammunition, and other costs incurred by Pakistani forces in the tribal areas—by far the largest source of U.S. funding to Pakistan. But American officials based in Afghanistan remained skeptical. Citing Pakistan's failure to crack down on the Taliban, they insisted that Musharraf was playing a "double game."

As a captive in the tribal areas, I saw firsthand evidence of the double game. The Haqqanis ruled Miran Shah, the capital of the North Waziristan tribal area. They strolled the streets of the city, along with Arab and Uzbek militants. Except for supply convoys, Pakistani forces appeared to leave their bases only rarely. Our guards took classes on how to make roadside bombs that would kill Afghan and American soldiers. Their test explosions echoed across Miran Shah's neighborhoods, but Pakistani forces on nearby bases appeared to take no notice.

After years of living with foreign militants in the tribal areas, a new generation of Afghan and Pakistani Taliban came to share their same goal of mounting an international jihad. They viewed both the Afghan and Pakistani governments as their bitter enemies. In the Giustozzi volume, a chapter by Thomas Ruttig, a German expert on Afghanistan, describes the Haqqanis' rise on both sides of the border. They used a combination of ruthlessness and discipline to create eastern Afghanistan's most powerful insurgent movement.

The anger at the American, Afghan, and Pakistani governments that fills Zaeef's autobiography reminded me of statements made by my Haqqani network guards. He makes arguably legitimate complaints, such as his imprisonment without trial for three years in Guantánamo, but then he drifts into the false world of conspiracy theory. He sees an American attempt to eradicate Islam itself. "The attack on Afghan culture and its Islamic values has exposed the true face of the Americans to the world," Zaeef writes. "The enmity of America

Fringe Tree

—Or Old Man's Beard.
That the names we give recall the thing
is what we want. And yet, both names are boring
when compared to the way it shimmers there
like a firework that somehow doesn't fall,
or the way it will fall eventually
from itself, swirling its gauzy pollen
in the wind above the lawn
where the children next door run outside in late April,
swearing to their mother that it's snowing.
And even after they know they're wrong,
they squeal, insisting their mistake
is something to dance through, something
to repeat and repeat again—not hoping
to make it right, just enjoying what it is
and what it looks like the more they say so.

JAMES MAY

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with Islam and Muslims as expressed by this thing they call 'terrorism' is clear for all to see."

I had heard such sentiments before. Just like our guards in captivity, Zaeef portrays himself as the victim of unprovoked American aggression. He unilaterally declares the Taliban the true leaders of the region and religion, and ignores the core issue: do the Taliban really represent Afghan culture and Islamic values? Public opinion polls in both Afghanistan and Pakistan show hostility toward the United States, but they also show that Afghans and Pakistanis do not support the Taliban either.

In his conclusion, Giustozzi offers a bit of cautionary advice to American and Afghan leaders. He says that ambitious plans to convince—and to pay—Taliban cadres to join the government may result in large numbers of low-level Taliban switching sides, but the hard-line, ideologically committed Taliban who constitute the backbone of the movement are unlikely to consider seriously negotiating with the government. "Today, when the Taliban have grown rapidly and seemingly become confident in final victory," he concludes, "the prospects of having genuine peace negotiations with the movement's hierarchy seems debatable."

Just recently, in January and February, Pakistani military officials adopted a new stance. After years of claiming to have no control of the Afghan Taliban, they privately offered to use their influence to help bring the Haqqanis and other Afghan Taliban to the negotiating table. Pakistani officials said that this reversal was an effort by Pakistan to preserve its influence in Afghanistan following the withdrawal of American troops. What happens next will be telling. If the Pakistanis do bring the Afghan Taliban to the negotiating table, it will give the lie to years of Pakistani protestations and prove that the Pakistani military does have influence over the Afghan Taliban. Even as it received $5 billion in American aid, Pakistan's military backed the Afghan Taliban as they killed nine hundred American soldiers since 2001.

Another scenario is more likely, and arguably more frightening. There is one prospect worse than Pakistani influence over the Afghan Taliban, and that is the Afghan Taliban's immunity to Pakistani influence. Pakistan's generals may find that in fact they now do not have the influence over the hard-line Afghan Taliban that they believe. A new generation of Afghan Taliban might remain unwaveringly committed to the jihad that they are waging with their Arab, Uzbek, and Pakistani brethren. They could hunker down in their tribal area strongholds and dare the Pakistani army to dislodge them. What then? As the American troop presence in the region shrinks in 2011 and 2012, the Afghan Taliban could re-emerge with a vengeance. ◆

Anthony Grafton
HUMANITIES AND INHUMANITIES

THE MARKETPLACE OF IDEAS: REFORM AND RESISTANCE IN THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY
By Louis Menand
(W. W. Norton, 174 pp., $24.95)

I.

THE LAST HOUR has come, the times are very bad. As it was in the twelfth century, when Bernard of Cluny began his bitter satire *On Contempt of the World* with those words, so it is now, in the halls of the humanities. Our space is shrinking: only one-third of American undergraduates still major in the arts and sciences, and less than a third of them in the humanities. We get no respect: the media stick to covering our dysfunctions, from the Paul de Man affair to the butchering of Robert Frost's notebooks. (All good editions are alike, perhaps, and every bad edition is bad in its own way.) But our worst enemies are ourselves: from William Chace, who argues that we helped to drive away our own students by dismembering the curriculum and substituting "for the books themselves a scattered array of secondary considerations (identity studies, abstruse theory, sexuality, film and popular culture)," to Mark Taylor, who declares that disciplines are obsolete and that "there is no longer a market for books modeled on the medieval dissertation, with more footnotes than text," to William Deresiewicz, who complains that we cannot talk to plumbers.

Some of the complaints are silly. Chace and Taylor tell us most scholarship is worthless, but how do they know? How could they know? And why should we listen to someone who condemns whole worlds of thought and writing that he cannot possibly have examined? Some of the complaints are wrong. Dissertations with footnotes really were a product of the early Enlightenment, though they were defended in the sort of disputations that originated in the Middle Ages. But some of the complaints are squarely on target. As almost all the critics point out, we humanists are devouring our young. Graduate students in the humanities take 9.3 years, on average, to obtain a doctorate—11.3 years, if you count time off between college and graduate school and occasional leaves. After dragging their lengths through all those years of mean seminars and endless paper grading, those who finish often discover that no jobs await them. The number of tenured and tenure-track jobs—never large enough for all those with doctorates—is falling like a stone, thanks to the current economic crisis. Meanwhile, at least in my discipline, the number of new Ph.D.s is actually rising, and in other fields the numbers remain high. All over the country, men and women who starred as undergraduates and have written original dissertations, won teaching prizes, and published excellent articles as graduate students find themselves precariously employed as "visiting assistant professors" ("visiting" is a technical term for minimal benefits, more courses to teach, and no security) or flying the freeways from one school to another, working as adjuncts for $1,500 or $2,000 a course.

LOUIS MENAND has been worrying about the humanities for a long time—at least since the 1990s, when the wave of new jobs for humanists predicted by William Bowen and Julie Ann Sosa failed to materialize. And he has some useful things to say about their state in his book, which took shape as a result of his participation in Harvard's most recent effort to reform general education. At once a professor and a public intellectual, Menand examines the academic humanities with an insider's expertise and an outsider's eye. He recognizes that academic humanists, whatever their politics, are conservative and defensive when challenged, and that their ideological conformity makes the university a duller place. He also knows that young humanists of both genders have become—as the historian R. M. Douglas wrote more than a decade ago—the contemporary equivalent to the "superfluous woman" of Victorian Britain, "obliged to eke out a penurious and uncertain existence as a teacher," but without the Victorian teacher's chance

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of being shipped off to a larger future in Canada or Australia. His book argues that the intellectual and human miseries of the academy—and it has plenty of both—are organically connected. Yet he is less interested in denouncing than in explaining. Given the situation that Menand describes, his book is curiously apathetic, and almost complacent.

Menand focuses on the elite institutions that still concentrate on providing an education in the arts and sciences, and argues that they have failed to respond to these and other painfully obvious problems because they remain stuck in patterns that were set a century and more ago. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, he explains, scholars set out to create a limited free space in which they could set standards for the fields they practiced and for undergraduate and graduate training—a professional space dedicated, like the legal and medical professional spaces that took shape at the same time, to pursuing the general good rather than personal gain.

University administrators, such as Harvard's Charles William Eliot, cooperated. They supported academic specialization, creating independent departments in which professors could pursue and pass on their research interests. They insisted that no one should enter professional study, in law and medicine as well as in the disciplines, without first having studied the liberal arts as an undergraduate. And they gave preference to Ph.D.s in hiring academic staff. These requirements created a national market for liberal-arts education of the new kind, at both the undergraduate and the graduate levels. The new-model colleges and universities—basically loose federations of associated disciplines, held together by tiny administrations—were fruitful and multiplied. Libraries and graduate schools, university presses and seminars clad in hideously distorted versions of Oxford and Cambridge, Venice and Siena, sprang up across the land in soybean fields and deserts.

The traditional college and university reached its peak after World War II, thanks to the baby boom and the Cold War. Graduate education grew even more quickly than undergraduate education, as universities expanded thanks to showers of federal and state money. But the peak was sharp as well as high, and by the 1970s the ground beneath it began to shift. In some respects, the results were positive: as the baby boom ended and colleges had too many places to fill with white males, they opened up to women and non-white people of both genders. But the financial crises of the time set limits to what had looked like permanent expansion, and the massive group of faculty who obtained permanent positions in the 1960s suddenly had few jobs to offer their successors. With stunning speed, the Land of Cockaigne became the Slough of Despond.

Wracking intellectual crises followed these social and institutional changes. Critics—Kuhn, Geertz, Rorty, White—reared in the old disciplines taught generations of younger scholars that the boundaries of their fields were arbitrary. By doing so, they helped to create Theory—even if a number of them felt, when they saw what became of their ideas, like Milton's Sin after she gave birth to Death. Meanwhile, younger scholars and students insisted on exploring and settling new territories: social history; literature by women, by people of color; the collaboration of social scientists with government. By a familiar paradox that Menand nicely brings out, the harder anyone tried to defend the old boundaries of the disciplines, the more arbitrary they now appeared. Innovation took root outside the disciplines—in programs and centers, rather than departments—places where scholars from varied disciplines could meet, teach, and debate, and that were vested with glamour and drama, but usually did not become power bases with jobs to fill. And after the anti-disciplinary revolution came the settlement: a mixed one, with interdisciplinarity reigning in English, an eclectic postdisciplinarity in anthropology, and many flowers blooming in history—and traditional rigor in philosophy.

Menand's account is consistently even-tempered, and he resists all temptations to succumb to nostalgia or to launch jeremiads, even when both might be appropriate. He does not portray the university in the age of New Criticism as a paradise of Serious Reading, or denounce the new forms of scholarship that have grown up more recently as one great betrayal of truth and high standards. Instead he sings a song of sclerosis. Through all these changes, he writes, the basic system of disciplines and departments remained intact—a hard and confining carapace that proved impossible to break, however humanists squirmed and pushed.

Efforts to create new forms of general education foundered because general education was aimed at preparing students for the world outside the academic walls. Nestled in their disciplinary armor, the professors—the descendants of those late–nineteenth-century reformers who created the university in the first place—distrusted, and resisted, the idea of training people for practical affairs. Interdisciplinarity hit its natural limits fairly soon. Administrators often liked interdisciplinary programs, since they sounded exciting, and staff could sometimes be appointed without deferring to departmental power, and they were cheap—but for the most part, though, the disciplines remained intact and in charge, and interdisciplinarity actually reinforced their authority. In theory, as Menand shows in a fine bit of academic comedy, interdisciplinary courses meant enabling two people from different disciplines to teach together: this would lead to productive collisions, which would in turn show faculty and students the limits of their perspectives. But in practice the faculty tended to go awry with highly idiosyncratic versions of their colleagues' disciplines, while their students sank into paralytic bewilderment.

Given these conditions, Menand believes, stasis is natural. Demands for general education have foundered on the reef of professionalism. Calls for interdisciplinarity serve mostly to make humanists nervous, since disciplinary structures have not only remained intact but grown stronger. I am not so sure that these explanations are complete or satisfactory. Natural scientists practice historically distinct disciplines that impose a high price of entry, that recognize tightly bounded communities of the competent, and in which error can have dramatic consequences—yet they seem to be designing courses to produce engineers and applied scientists who can do all sorts of jobs in the real world and to be forming interdisciplinary teams and institutes in every crevice of my university. Maybe the causes of the failure of the humanists to rebuild curricula and create new forms of academic work and teaching lie a bit deeper than the surface, the structural level, at which Menand works.

As opportunity fled, demands rose. Despite all the denunciations of the barbarians at the gates, academic standards have become higher in the last few decades. In the age of poverty that began in the 1970s and has continued to the present, under-funded humanities departments all over the country could hire first-rate young faculty and aspire to be centers of

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innovative research, writing, and teaching. Professors, graduate students, and prospective employers all came to see the doctorate not as an academic exercise but as the draft for an ambitious book—the book that one would have to write in order to earn tenure at institutions where some older faculty had never published anything.

At the same time, though, other, and stronger, forces pushed downward. The cheaper the crook: every president wanted to make his institution a prestigious research university—though many could not or did not provide the resources to support scholars and teachers. Doctoral programs continued to open even as the number of jobs for their products decreased. There were lots and lots of graduate students, lots and lots of Ph.D.s, many of them in debt up to their eyeballs because they had not received fellowship support. Eventually, departments at some elite private universities cut student numbers, accepting only those whom they could more or less support. But far more universities supported students by setting them to work as teachers than by offering full fellowships. The need to staff undergraduate sections and courses, and not the realistic chances of graduate placement, often determined admissions policies. In most years, new Ph.D.s—to say nothing of all qualified job seekers—outnumbered new jobs. No wonder, then, that the time to degree grew longer and longer, as students clung to subsistence incomes in the pleasant cities and college towns they already knew.

Administrators, meanwhile, began to treat systematic underemployment as a feature, not a bug, and made of it a management tool. They realized that they could finance elementary teaching by taking in large numbers of graduate students, keeping them at work for eight or nine years on low pay, running sections and occasional courses, and then spewing them forth unemployed or re-employing them as adjuncts. Though Menand's emphasis lies elsewhere, he acknowledges these awful conditions—and suggests that they help to explain the homogeneity of those who actually survive the training and remain to teach.

II.

As a structural account of (to quote the title of an important book by Marc Bousquet) how the university works, *The Marketplace of Ideas* has much to recommend it. Young humanists—especially would-be graduate students—should read it in order to gain some sense of how their institutional world is embedded in history. But it is an odd book, and as it moves from description and analysis to suggestions for reform, it goes off the rails.

Menand describes the university in generalities. Many of them strike one as true, but some of them seem to reflect a much narrower experience even than he has had, and imply a surprisingly reductionist perspective. Early on he notes that, once upon a time, being a professor meant having a vast fund of esoteric knowledge that the ordinary person could not match—but now, Menand smugly observes, "most of that esoterica is available instantly on Wikipedia." What?! If the esoterica in question have to do with Britain and America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (and even there I have my doubts), maybe. But how many humanities professors and students are prepared to make do with Wikipedia's "esoterica"? They interpret Chinese classics that have to be pieced together from bamboo strips, or they reconstruct Greek texts from fragments preserved in garbage dumps and mummy wrappings, or they record and interpret religious ceremonies in India and Nepal. You cannot do those jobs without esoteric knowledge. You cannot Wiki them.

Such slips are not minor. They are not even slips. They reveal an error of principle. Menand's statement that graduate students do not need specialized knowledge is an astonishing and terrible concession: taken literally, it defines the humanities as a realm of simple problems simply solved. No sweat, no dust, no romance, no struggle. But the great humanists are furious, passionate giants who heave one mountain onto another as they stage their attacks on Olympus. At its Faustian and demonic peaks, the tradition of modern humanism includes Benjamin on the Paris arcades and Scholem on the Kabbalah, Fraenkel on Greek and Latin literature and Weinreich on the Yiddish language, Neugebauer on ancient science and Kantorowicz on law and political symbols and Klemperer on the language of the Third Reich, Wittgenstein and Curtius, Kristeller and Panofsky, Syme and Momigliano, Arendt and Colie. Merely to mention these names is to see the inadequacy of Menand's analysis.

Most of us, and most of our students, are in no danger of performing at that august level. But when we enter on our studies, we take unto ourselves these and other masters, and we sprinkle ourselves with their dust. Anyone who has watched humanists work over the last generation or two has seen new masters take the places of the ones who came before them, and has marveled as they restored new ideas, voices, songs, and images to our records and our canons. We still climb the mountain, or at least we try. But Menand doesn't think we even need to build base camps anymore. He is post-grandeur. To accept this view is to transform the Faustian magic of high scholarship into the sterile performance of drab professional duties. We will have no place to stand against the administrators who want to eliminate our fields because we bring in no money and the critics who insist that we are charlatans. More important, we will have only stones, not bread, to offer hungry readers and students.

Menand's loss of patience, or faith, or interest, in specialized knowledge actually underpins his major proposal for reform. Toward the end of his book he suggests—and not for the first time—that universities could ease the misery of doctoral candidates in the humanities by radically shortening their programs. Abridgement, Menand argues, would not cause serious intellectual problems. After all, "normally a dissertation in the humanities does not require extensive archival, field, or laboratory work." What on earth is he talking about? The students I know in English departments—admittedly, most of them concentrate on the period from 1500 to 1800—learn the languages and literatures that the English writers whom they study knew and emulated, and discover new and gripping texts in manuscripts, and reconstruct the institutions of publishing and literature from the archives, and think hard about hard texts. All this takes time. In history—a field which awards as many Ph.D.s each year as English—you certainly cannot write a dissertation without doing archival work or fieldwork or both. In classics or German or East Asian studies, you must master not only languages but also cultural canons—in addition, these days, to the works outside the canon that have suddenly revealed their interest. And then there is musicology, where you need the languages, and the archives, and the music. Anyway, there already exists a way to do a limited amount of reading and a short piece of research in complex, demanding fields like this: it's called an M.A. Making M.A. programs take longer and rechristening them as Ph.D.s is a bit like chaining buses together, putting them on tracks, and calling them a train.

In the end, though, the deepest problem with Menand's approach is precisely that it is structural: he deals with institutions and disciplines, in the way committees and reports do. But it

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is only when you leave the thin air of Big History and climb down to the local and the personal that you remember some of the vital things that a structural account omits. Menand is right to argue that problems built into the university system as it took shape before 1900 and as it expanded in the 1950s and 1960s have helped to make the current situation as bad as it is. But he nowhere tells the reader what every academic of his (and my) age knows, at least anecdotally: the academic humanities were not a featherbed for the repose of sluggards in the old days, either.

Most male assistant professors, back when Menand and I were young, had risen to glory, carried by cherubs, in the happy 1960s, the one brief period when going to graduate school, like having sex, was relatively safe. They knew, and they told us, that academics had never had it so good. Their own teachers, the men (mostly) who ran the '60s universities, had had to fight their way in. Only the G.I. Bill enabled many of them to go to college at all. Aspirations to graduate school were met with warnings. You had to be an Aryan from Darien with a private income or you could not hope to get work. Even if you did find a job, the pay would be miserable. Undergraduates who babysat in academic homes before the Great Expansion sometimes saw their professors moving unpayable bills around their kitchen tables in a weird and hopeless version of gin rummy. Women had it much harder than the boys did: for generations there were not even words to name the intellectual and personal injustices they suffered. And scholars of color put up with indignities that make one ashamed for the professors and universities that inflicted them.

Why did anyone begin work on a doctorate in the humanities in those days? Why does anyone do it now? They did it in the past—and their academic grandchildren do it now—for reasons that are not dreamt of in the philosophy and theology of the market. Becoming a humanist, let us remember, is not just signing up for a job. It certainly does not open the way to power or wealth: scholar has never rhymed with dollar. To become a trained humanist, rather, is to join a tradition, which has usually been embattled, while parents scream "No, for God's sake go to law school!" (That is what Petrarch's father said to him, thereby inaugurating a great tradition.) In the old days, a professor did not receive a job offer, but a "call"—as ministers and rabbis did. To enter this tradition, you have always needed intellectual ability and technical skills, but even more you need conviction and passion and determination. One might say that you need a vocation. And the vocation of scholarship is hard, as Weber warned in times worse than these.

One reason graduate school demands so much time, so much effort, and so much difficulty is that it is designed—badly, and clumsily, but not insanely—to attract and then to test people who think they have this sort of calling. Graduate study is nothing less than a quest—and you cannot undertake a meaningful quest without trials. Menand does not grasp this existential reality. As long as graduate school is this sort of place—and it still is, and it still has to be, or the traditions that it preserves will wither and die—its intellectual demands will be high, and its psychic ones higher, and it will require long years of study.

I DO NOT MEAN that graduate training cannot, or should not, change in the future—as it changed, glacially, in the past, to admit those it had once excluded. Humanists should be humane—and you need only set one virtual toe into the academic blogosphere to learn that many of us fail at that elementary duty every day. Universities should treat graduate students decently: one reason that humanists take so long to earn their doctorates is, quite simply, that they are paid so little, and have to spend so much on obligatory health insurance, that they have to take on other work. Humanities professors must work out how to compromise: watch us discussing proposals for general education or new interdisciplinary programs, as Menand shows, and you will find yourself thinking that the Senate really is a serious deliberative body.

Many of our disciplines and practices are indeed in need of refinement and improvement. We and our students must learn how to use—and to create—new digital tools. These have already democratized the world of learning by giving free access to millions of sources that were once available only to the privileged. They have provided new and effective ways to present and analyze much of the greatest art of the last century and this one. And they are quickly engorging the world of writing and reading. Humanists must enter this new country, as our predecessors entered the new country of print in the fifteenth century, and settle and cultivate parts of it. By doing so we will reach not only our own students, but larger and larger audiences around the country and the world. And going digital also means working out how to collaborate, with other humanists and with specialists in technology, and allocate credit in a fair way. This will yield benefits of many kinds. Collaboration is the thief of academic time, but it is also a delight.

So there are new pleasures in store for humanists in the next couple of generations. But we cannot make digital humanists at the cost of losing humanists who know languages, and methods of interpretation, and the other tools forged by the generations—the tools that one masters only by applying them. Graduate study in the humanities should become more varied and more social in the decades to come, but it is still going to be hard—in fact, it is going to be harder, since it will require even more skills than before; and it is still going to be for those who care so much for it, as a matter of principle and feeling, that they cannot do anything else.

Year after year, undergraduates and M.A. students find themselves on fire to do research and to teach. Some of them burn for other things as well, and follow other paths. Some discover that their vocations are not deep enough to last out the process of testing. But many stick it out—and finish—only to find that the completed quest leads into Rats' Alley. These are the people whom our system is now chewing up. It is hard to keep that pure light burning while you serve as cheap labor in graduate school; and harder still if you join the reserve army of even cheaper labor when you finish; and bitterly hard, in another way, when you actually find a job and then see your aspirations to create a new, more enlightened curriculum crushed by the constraints of professionalism.

The old system sinned by exclusion: of Jews and Catholics, of women, of people of color. In recent years those barriers have fallen away. But new ones have replaced them. The English professor William Pannapacker has written movingly and accurately about the plight of young humanists. He recently suggested, with justified savagery, that only those who have private means and backing from elite academics should enter doctoral programs in the humanities. As it was in the beginning, apparently, so it is now: if not back to the Aryans from Darien, then back to the more varied, but still minute and privileged, group who have trust funds and cultural capital. In fact, the authors of a 2004 study of graduate training in history already noted that top programs tended to admit the undergraduate products of elite private universities. So much for most of the progress

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we thought we had made in peopling the humanities with new kinds of students and teachers. It is a truly dreadful prospect. Yet when a young person with a passion for scholarship comes into your office and asks about graduate school, this is the general situation that you should responsibly sketch for him or her.

But thinking about the academy only, or mainly, as a market is another matter. As Menand unwittingly shows, it narrows the field of vision. The humanities need reform because their traditions are confining and their job market is a catastrophe, but reform cannot mean surrender, or dilution. It means finding out how to do what the scientists have already done: how to combine the rigor of tradition with experiment and innovation—but without replacing hordes of underpaid adjuncts with hordes of underpaid post-docs, as the scientists have. More generally, it means finding creative ways to make life instructively hard, for a few years, for the broadest range of talented people of all sorts and conditions whom we can educate and then employ productively and decently. What makes reform urgent is the passion, the erudition, and the intelligence of those whom the academy is now failing—the sheer destruction of talent and love and energy, of the traditions of deep learning, over which we humanists are presiding. The masters of the next generation are still knocking on our doors, but most of them find themselves too busy speeding down the freeway to their next campus, grading stacks of papers, and worrying about their debts to learn as they wish to learn and as we need them to learn. They are missing from Menand's cool, lucid, and limited book, as they are from so much of what is thought and written about us humanists in these bad days. ◆

Richard A. Posner
1937, 2010

SUPREME POWER: FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT VS. THE SUPREME COURT
By Jeff Shesol
(W. W. Norton, 656 pp., $27.95)

In 1937 President Roosevelt tried to "pack" the Supreme Court—increase its size so that he could fill the vacancies thus created with liberals, who would shift the balance of power from the conservative majority that had invalidated a number of New Deal laws. Surprisingly—considering the overwhelming margin by which Roosevelt had been re-elected in 1936, the Democrats' lock on both houses of Congress, and the pertinacity with which he pushed his plan—the Court-packing bill never even came to a vote.

This episode, I would guess, is known to few Americans, and interests still fewer—mainly students of the Supreme Court. It is therefore surprising that in 2010 a book of more than six hundred pages should appear written not by a law professor or an academic historian but by a speechwriter for President Clinton, and aimed at a popular audience, though its seventy-two pages of notes and bibliography attest to the depth of the author's scholarship. It is still more surprising that Jeff Shesol's book should be timely, for the light it casts on the politics of our current economic situation and on the situation itself. The book is also splendid to read. It will fascinate anyone who is interested in Roosevelt, the New Deal, the 1930s, Congress, the presidency, the Great Depression, judges, the Supreme Court, or constitutional law.

When Roosevelt was inaugurated in March 1933, the American economy was in dreadful shape. The unemployment rate was 25 percent; the banking system was in a state of near paralysis because the fear and actuality of numerous bank failures had caused massive withdrawals (there was no deposit insurance); economic output had fallen by one-third since 1929, and prices had fallen by 20 percent. Falling prices sound like a good thing, but they can be a disaster. Because wages even in a depression tend to be sticky, falling prices reduce firms' revenues but not their labor costs, so they have to lay off workers to bring their costs in line with their shrunken revenues. And consumers who expect prices to continue falling will hold off on buying. Desperate to get them to open their wallets, firms have to cut prices even more drastically and thus lay off even more of their workers to control their costs, accelerating the economy's swoon.

Roosevelt did four things immediately upon taking office to restart the economy. The first was to boost public confidence by delivering an inspiring inaugural address, inspiring not only in content ("we have nothing to fear but fear itself"—false, but reassuring) but also in the upbeat manner of his delivery. Confidence is all-important in getting businessmen to invest and consumers to buy; without confidence, both groups tend to hoard their money rather than spend it, and economic activity droops.

Roosevelt's second measure was to declare a bank holiday. All banks were shut down while federal examiners pored over their books. After a few days, most of the banks were pronounced sound (this was sleight of hand—there wasn't enough time, or enough bank examiners, to examine thousands of banks carefully) and allowed to re-open. The public was reassured, and the drain of bank capital ceased, so money was again available for borrowing by businessmen and consumers.

Third, Roosevelt took the United States off the gold standard. Until then, anyone could exchange the paper dollars issued by the Federal Reserve for gold. This limited the supply of dollars, because if the Fed increased the supply each dollar would be worth less, so people would exchange their paper dollars for gold and the government's gold holdings would rapidly be depleted. With the government off the gold standard, the Fed could and did increase the money supply, which increased the ratio of dollars to goods, thus causing inflation. That was deliberate. Inflation, by increasing prices, reduces real wages (assuming, as is plausible, that in a depression employers can resist demands for wage increases even if they cannot force wage reductions) and therefore reduces producers' costs. It also induces consumers to spend because the purchasing power of any money they hoard will be declining. And by reducing indebtedness it provides an additional encouragement to consumers to spend—and the more they spend, the more that output and hence employment will rise. Inflation also reduces the value of the dollar relative to foreign currencies. That makes exports cheaper and imports more expensive, which stimulates domestic production—production for export but also production of substitutes for the now more costly imported goods. And fourth, Roosevelt instituted public works projects that, within months, put millions of the unemployed to work.

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So far, so good. But at his urging, Congress at the outset of the new administration passed a number of statutes, of which the most important were the National Industrial Recovery Act and the Agricultural Adjustment Act, that impeded recovery from the depression. (A forgivable weakness of Shesol's book is that he does not recognize the economic incoherence of the New Deal program.) Since "ruinous competition" was (incorrectly) believed to be a cause of the depression, the ironically named Recovery Act encouraged industries to establish codes of "fair competition," which if approved by the president became binding, and which essentially were agreements among competing firms to fix prices and, in conjunction with unions, wages. The effect was higher prices and higher wages. The higher prices were real rather than merely inflationary; they were cartel prices that reduced output and employment. And wage increases retard economic recovery. The agriculture act was designed to increase farm prices by reducing output, so again the effect was that of a cartel. Similar output-reducing statutes were enacted for the coal and oil industries.

These New Deal laws and others were invalidated by the Supreme Court in 1935 and 1936, though not because they were economically counterproductive. The Court opposed them because they delegated too much legislative power to the executive branch (that was the main ground on which the Recovery Act was invalidated), or because they exceeded Congress's power to regulate commerce (for example because agriculture and mining were deemed local).

The Court that invalidated these laws was composed of three factions: a liberal faction of Brandeis, Cardozo, and Stone; an extreme conservative faction of Butler, McReynolds, Sutherland, and Van Devanter; and a moderately conservative faction of Hughes (the chief justice) and Roberts. The moderate conservatives lined up with the extreme conservatives in the 1935 and 1936 cases, joined often by one or more of the liberals: the invalidation of the Recovery Act—a widely unpopular law, mainly because of its chaotic administration—was unanimous. Some New Deal measures survived, including the most important one to come before the Court—the government's repudiation of its contractual obligation to redeem paper dollars in gold on demand. The amount of gold that the government would have owed the obligees, whom inflation would have driven to demand redemption, would have exceeded the nation's gold reserves by a factor of twenty-five. Roosevelt had resolved that if the Court decided against him, he would defy the Court's decision.

Roosevelt was distressed by the Court's elimination of New Deal programs, but less because of the specific programs than because of what the decisions portended for the rest of the New Deal legislative program. The Court's grounds seemed likely to doom the entire remaining agenda, which included the union-friendly Wagner Act, wages and hours legislation, social security, consumer protection, prohibition of child labor, and much else besides. The Court seemed determined to prevent the growth of federal power that Roosevelt thought essential to economic recovery, social justice, and (given the growing prestige of totalitarian regimes in the 1930s) the survival of democracy. In fact, aside from the four measures that Roosevelt had taken immediately upon assuming office, the New Deal program was more likely to impede than promote recovery. But it was a response to powerful political pressures, and a failure to yield to them could have rent the nation's political and social fabric.

Although the average age of the Supreme Court justices in January 1937, when Roosevelt's second term began and an overwhelmingly Democratic Congress was sworn in, was seventy-one, there was no indication of imminent vacancies among the five justices who had voted most consistently to invalidate New Deal statutes. Given the potential for political instability and social unrest if the entire New Deal program was killed, Roosevelt was right to strike at the Court, especially as he had a more sensible conception of the Constitution than that of the conservative justices then, or their counterparts now, or of liberal justices beginning with the Warren Court of the 1960s—a conception of a Constitution flexible enough to permit the government to meet the needs of modern society that the Framers of the Constitution could not have foreseen.

The plan, which did not require a constitutional amendment to enact because the Constitution does not fix the size of the Supreme Court, was to enlarge the Court as follows: if a justice declined to retire within six months after reaching the age of seventy (as he could do at full pay), a new justice could be appointed. The maximum size of the Court was to be fifteen. Six of the justices were over seventy, so if all declined to retire, the Court would reach its maximum size. Even if none of the six septuagenarians (five of the conservatives plus Brandeis) retired, Roosevelt would still be able to appoint six liberal justices, and so the balance would shift from 6-3 in favor of the conservatives to 9-6 in favor of the liberals. If all six eligibles retired and Roosevelt appointed liberals in their place, the balance would be 8-1 in favor of the liberals—Cardozo and Stone plus the six new appointments. Roberts would be the sole conservative.

Court packing (and unpacking—eliminating a vacancy to prevent the president from making an appointment) was not new. But it had not been done since 1867, and Roosevelt badly misplayed his hand. He had not mentioned the Court during the election campaign and thus had not prepared the electorate for an assault on it. He sprang the plan on Congress without warning, which congressional leaders resented; they were allowed no hand in drafting the Court-packing bill. (Obama has been careful—maybe too careful—to avoid this kind of mistake.) And he justified the plan publicly on the patently false ground that the older justices could not keep up with the work of the Court and that as a result the Court was falling behind. In fact, then as now, the justices were not overworked and the elderly ones carried their share of the workload—and everyone knew it. Moreover, a plan grounded in considerations of judicial efficiency could not inspire the public support that Roosevelt needed to overcome the fear, which was not limited to his conservative opponents, that he was trying, albeit by constitutional means, to unbalance the balance of powers created by the Constitution. (It didn't help that the Nazi press praised the Court-packing plan!) And the ground on which Roosevelt sought to justify the plan set the stage for a devastating riposte by Chief Justice Hughes, who arranged to be invited by Senator Wheeler, an outspoken opponent of the Court-packing plan, to write Wheeler a letter concerning the justices' ability to keep up with their workload. The letter, which Hughes implied spoke for the entire Court, assured Wheeler, who quickly made it public, that "The Supreme Court is fully abreast of its work."

What finally killed the plan was an unbroken string of surprising victories for the New Deal in the Supreme Court—twelve in all, with no defeats—while the Court-packing plan was being debated, coupled with the sudden retirement of Justice Van Devanter, one of the four extreme conservatives (who accelerated his retirement in order to help defeat the

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plan), and topped off by the sudden death of Senate Majority Leader Joseph Robinson. Having been promised by Roosevelt appointment to the first vacancy on the Court, Robinson was at the time of his death making Herculean efforts to persuade his colleagues to vote for the Court-packing plan.

Hughes and Roberts abandoned the other conservatives in all twelve cases. They may have done so in order to defeat the Court-packing plan. It is true that the first of the decisions—which, overruling an earlier decision of the Court, upheld the federal minimum-wage law, and which is generally regarded as the turning point for the Court because it was the first decision in the string—was voted on by the justices (though not issued) before the plan was announced. But the vote came after the 1936 election, and it was believed that Roosevelt would mount some kind of serious challenge to the Court. Hughes and Roberts, especially Hughes, were less conservative than Butler, McReynolds, Sutherland, and Van Devanter—less inclined, therefore, to go down with the ship—and they may also have been influenced by an extraordinary wave of sit-down strikes and labor violence that coincided with the Court-packing controversy and made it seem that the country was coming apart at the seams (though the economy had improved a good deal). The two justices may have come to believe that to kill the New Deal would be playing with fire in the name of dubious constitutional doctrines to which neither of them was as emotionally committed as their extreme conservative colleagues. If that was their thinking, I am enough of a legal realist to withhold criticism of their "political" decision making.

When Hughes finished reading from the bench his opinions upholding the Wagner Act, "a prominent lawyer" in the audience section of the courtroom "rose from his seat, turned to a colleague, and said, 'Chief Justice Hughes has saved the Supreme Court.' 'I think,' his colleague replied, 'he has saved the United States as well.'" As *The New Yorker* sarcastically observed, "the Supreme Court's about-face was not due to outside clamor. It seems that the new [Supreme Court] building [completed in 1935] has a soundproof room, to which the Justices retire to change their minds." And as Roosevelt remarked after the Court-packing plan went down to defeat, "We lost the battle, but we won the war." He indeed had won, though at substantial cost to his prestige, and to his relations with Congress, whose barons he had treated with disdain.

I SAID THAT Shesol's book was timely. Like Franklin Roosevelt, Barack Obama is an ambitious and charismatic liberal who took over from a discredited conservative administration and a demoralized Republican Party at a time of severe economic stress. Like Roosevelt, he is passionately hated in some quarters and the subject of vicious, groundless rumors. As with Roosevelt, the election that brought him to power created strong Democratic majorities in both the Senate and the House of Representatives, yet also like Roosevelt he faces a politically conservative Supreme Court that is more than willing to invalidate state and federal laws that it does not like.

Then as now, bankers, who "just a few years earlier had been second to no one in prestige and self-regard," saw "the world they knew … turned on its head." Then as now, a liberal president was attacked from the left as well as from the right, "taking heat from liberals for the big-business orientation of the New Deal, for siding frequently with industry against the claims of labor and consumers."

Also like Roosevelt, Obama has a three-track legislative program. The first track is recovery from depression and includes the auto and bank bailouts, and the $787 billion stimulus package, and the stress tests of the banks, and mortgage relief, and a moderate inflation—all recovery measures that resemble Roosevelt's. The second track (illustrated in the Roosevelt administration by federal deposit insurance, the separation of commercial from investment banking, and the creation of the Securities and Exchange Commission) is financial regulatory reform designed to prevent a recurrence of the conditions that caused the depression. The third is long-term socio-economic reform.

In Obama's administration as in Roosevelt's, the second and third parts of the president's program are at war with the first. Imposing new regulatory restrictions on business creates uncertainty in the business community, and uncertainty tends to freeze economic activity. The restrictions also reduce output by increasing costs. The new credit card law, for example, and the pressure that the administration is exerting on banks to modify rather than foreclose mortgages, are adding to the costs of banks and by doing so reducing their lending. And just as New Deal measures designed to increase wages and prices by reducing competition in labor and product markets retarded recovery, so the present administration's programs of health-insurance reform and climate-change legislation are likely, if adopted, to increase the costs of businesses and, by increasing our immense federal budget deficits, push up interest rates and thereby curtail economic activity.

Despite his brilliant opening moves in the battle against the Depression, Roosevelt had little understanding of economics (but, in that, he had the company of most economists and businessmen). He probably did not sense the tension between New Deal measures that would promote recovery and the larger New Deal program of social reform that would slow down the recovery. His lack of understanding is shown by a series of disastrous moves in 1937, which included both higher taxes and reduced government spending, measures that in combination with the Federal Reserve's pushing up interest rates to curb rising inflation brought on—within months after the Court-packing controversy ended—a second depression before the nation had fully recovered from the first one. That second depression weighs heavily on policymakers today. Our deficits are creating a risk of serious future inflation, yet measures to reduce the deficits, whether through higher taxes, cuts in government spending, or higher interest rates (which would reduce the amount of money in circulation and thus the potential for a serious inflation) would impede recovery from our current economic doldrums.

John Maynard Keynes warned Roosevelt about the dangers of trying to combine recovery with reform—he urged that reform be postponed until the economy recovered. Roosevelt rejected Keynes's advice. I don't know whether Obama's economic advisers have given him similar

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You're swallowed
galaxy-wide—with its
quantum bits, its dark dust
backdeals by up-or-down

thumbthrust. You're sand-
paper tongue to mankind's
new hivemind, the Internet:
large-looming electric silk
pulled finer & finer

across our woken wow.
Words, forget yourselves.
Yes or no, true or false—
space & time are said &
done without you now.

CHRISTOPHER PHELPS

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advice; but if they have, he, like Roosevelt, has rejected it, whether out of political calculation or ideological commitment.

The defeat of the Court-packing plan holds three specific lessons for today. One is the role of passion in the political process. Votes in political elections are not weighted by intensity; a vote cast with lesser-of-two-evils tepidness has the same weight as one cast with passionate conviction. Conservatives took a tremendous shellacking in the 1936 election, yet within a few months they were able to mount a powerful and, in the end, successful campaign against Roosevelt's first post-election initiative, because their emotional intensity far exceeded that of the plan's supporters. This disparity in commitment weighed with politicians thinking about the next election. For passion would affect turnout and campaign contributions. We are seeing this today: the opponents of Obama's legislative program are far more excited than its supporters.

Second, and again observed today, are the limits of congressional party loyalty to the President, even among members of Congress who rode into office on his coattails. Members of Congress are more concerned with their prerogatives and their prospects for re-election than with "their" president's achieving his legislative goals. A president may actually have an easier time when the opposing party controls Congress. That is illustrated by the improvement in Clinton's political fortunes and policy accomplishments after the Republicans won majorities in both houses of Congress in the 1994 election, until the Lewinsky scandal tempted the Republicans to try to bring him down. When the executive and legislative branches are in different hands, both have an interest in compromise and the president's party accepts that he must govern from the middle, which is where a president can expect maximum popular support. The current Democratic Congress designed a stimulus program poorly, as a result of which it is widely regarded (unfairly, I think) as a giant pork barrel, and it has made a mess of the president's health insurance initiative, and it is fighting with the president over financial regulatory reform.

And third, there is the mystique of the Supreme Court, a source of formidable political power because it makes the Court seem to be "above" politics. (Judges like to refer to the legislative and executive branches of government as "the political branches," as if the judiciary were not a political branch as well.) Even though political considerations figure significantly and often decisively in federal judicial appointments, especially at the Supreme Court level, and even though the vagueness, complexity, occasional antiquity, and frequent internal inconsistency of American law combine to vest our judges with enormous discretion—above all in constitutional cases that touch on political issues—a sense persists that judges are different from politicians and should be immune from political retaliation for unpopular decisions. Judges *are* different from other senior officials. They are on average more professional, less partisan, much less subject to interest-group pressures, abler to take the long view of issues, and more decorous and restrained than elected politicians. The Constitution is venerated by Americans—one of the founders of the American Liberty League, the New Deal's fiercest antagonist, said that the League's "first appeal should be to the effect that the Constitution is perfect"—and the Supreme Court likes to think of itself as the custodian of the Constitution, its faithful oracle. As Shesol points out, "the more aggressive [the Supreme Court justices in the 1930s] grew in overruling legislatures, the more they assumed a posture of humility and passivity." *The Wall Street Journal*'s comment on the decision invalidating the National Industrial Recovery Act was that "the Constitution has survived the depression." Constitutional idolatry is a platform of today's right wing as well; it is the sophisticated version of biblical inerrancy.

The conservative justices of the 1930s were on notably weak ground in invalidating New Deal laws for supposed inconsistency with the constitutional text. The text did not speak to such issues as whether agriculture is a part of interstate commerce and thus can be regulated by the federal government, or whether legislative power can be delegated by the legislature to federal agencies or, as in the case of the National Industrial Recovery Act, to trade associations whose exercise of delegated power is subject to review by a federal agency.

Like Roosevelt, Obama is trying to shift the line between government and business leftward. He already has done so to a degree, in the auto bailouts, the banker pay caps, the credit card law, the stimulus law, and the mortgage-relief law. He wants to go further. Will he at some point collide with the Supreme Court? It is not impossible, though I think it unlikely. The current Court, the most conservative since 1937, with four very conservative justices, four liberal ones, and a moderate conservative (Kennedy) occupying the Hughes-Roberts swing position, has backtracked on the broad New Deal understanding of federal power to regulate interstate commerce and has invalidated federal statutes with something approaching abandon—forty between 1991 and 2009, compared to only twenty-nine between 1918 and 1936.

I would be giving a misleading impression of Shesol's book if I did not remark his striking portrait of Roosevelt. Few question the greatness of Roosevelt as a president, but there has been a tendency to question his intelligence, or at least his intellectual energy. He had not been a good student, or a good lawyer. He was an impatient reader, who preferred oral briefings. His legislative program lacked coherence. He was shrewd, politically astute, charismatic, courageous, buoyant, and humane. But Shesol shows that he was also a keenly engaged, intellectually resourceful student of the Constitution and the Supreme Court. He had speechwriters, but he shaped and altered their drafts. His State of the Union speech of January 6, 1937, delivered just a month before he sent his Court-packing plan to Congress, articulated a more sophisticated constitutional philosophy than that of his opponents when he said that the Constitution's framers "were fully aware that civilization would raise problems for the proposed new Federal Government, which they themselves could not even surmise; and . . . it was their definite intent and expectation that a liberal interpretation in the years to come would give to the Congress the same relative powers over new national problems as they themselves gave to the Congress over the national problems so their day. . . . Means must be found to adapt our legal and our judicial interpretation to the actual present needs of the largest progressive democracy in the modern world."

Would it really have been so terrible had the Court-packing bill passed? I am not so sure. It would have increased turnover on the Court, reduced the average age of justices, made an appointment to the Court less prestigious, and made the justices more cautious about bucking strong political forces, because they would have learned that Congress was willing as well as able to rein them in. We would probably have been spared the excesses of the Warren Court, which turned Roosevelt's idea of the "living Constitution" on its head: where Roosevelt wanted the Court to stand aside so that the government could deal with the distinctive problems of modernity, the Warren Court responded to the surging crime rates of the 1950s and 1960s by increasing the rights of criminals. ◆

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Washington Diarist

The People's People

I should not speak ill of the dead, but what of the dead who spoke ill of the dead? Many years ago an acquaintance of mine applied for a position at the Museum of the City of New York, over which Louis Auchincloss presided. The search committee met in the writer's apartment on Park Avenue. When the candidate was asked to describe what he would do to improve the institution, he replied that too many people were not represented in its galleries, and noted in particular the inadequacy of the museum's portrayal of African Americans. "What would you have us do," Auchincloss sneered, "create a period room with a hovel in it?" I was reminded of that sickening remark when I read Auchincloss's obituary in the *Times* a few weeks ago. It was one of those death notices that make me chuckle. How's this for immortality? "I knew perfectly well what it meant to be rich in New York. If you were rich, you lived in a house with a pompous beaux-arts façade and kept a butler and gave children's parties with spun sugar on the ice cream and little cups of real silver as game prizes. If you were not rich you lived in a brownstone with Irish maids who never called you Master Louis and parents who hollered up and down the stairs instead of ringing bells." This was Auchincloss's bathetic reminiscence of his boyhood, though it also anticipates the shrunken epicene standpoint of the Manhattan of Bloomberg and Blankfein—except for one glaring difference, one deliciously American usurpation. Master Louis never knew what it meant to be poor in New York, of course; and when critics accused him of Park Avenue provincialism, he accused them of "class prejudice," and protested grumpily that "nobody holds it against" James and Wharton and Thackeray and Proust. That is because their subject was not money, even if they wrote about the rich; but never mind, snobbery is a hurtful thing. It pleases me to think of Auchincloss's white-shoe resentment. A country in which he whined about class prejudice is a hopeful place. We are not a solid but a fluid. In America, elitists cannot sleep.

And certainly not if Sarah Palin has her way. "I'm never going to pretend like I know more than the next person," she recently told Chris Wallace, which is just as well. And she added: "I'm not going to pretend to be an elitist. In fact, I'm going to fight the elitist, because for too often and for too long now, I think the elitists have tried to make people like me and people in the heartland of America feel like we just don't get it." At the Tea Party convention in Nashville, Palin made a similar claim for the moral superiority of ordinariness, twangily championing "real people, not politicos, not inside-the-Beltway professionals," and "everyday Americans," and finally "the people." Palin is packaging herself as the perfect image of the American mean. It is an affront to the heartland. But since the pitch is working—"the lady is good," the sobersides David Broder exclaimed—a few clarifications are in order. For a start, there are no unreal people. Even Mitch McConnell is real. Even Frank Rich is real. The invocation of "the people" sounds inclusive, but it is a technique of exclusion. (This was also the case in the preamble to the Constitution.) It is based upon a particular definition of "the people." How do Palin and the partiers know who the real Americans are? The mystical certainty of her divisive intuition reminds me of what intellectual historians used to call the "epistemological privilege" of Marx's proletariat, his reprehensible old idea that access to truth is a feature of class position. Palin, too, is idealizing the proletariat for the uniqueness of its understanding, though her economics is starkly indifferent to its tribulations. And if you throw in Palin's views on the "social issues," on the questions by which we measure the decency of our society, then it is clear that this is an anti-elitism that is not an egalitarianism, a common touch without genuine commonality, which is quite an accomplishment.

There is also the rather immense hypocrisy of Palin and many other populists. Anyone who has run for the vice presidency, and has published a monster bestseller, and appears regularly on television, and will run for the presidency is a member in good standing of the American elite. Even lesser attainments of prominence and success confer the same loathed status. The anti-elitists in the Republican caucus in the House and the Senate, and in the conservative commentariat, and in the Heritage Foundation and the American Enterprise Institute and the Cato Institute—they are anti-elitists in the elite. Scott Brown proved that nothing gets you to Washington faster than a pickup truck, but he will have a hideaway now. For years liberals used to be ridiculed for their condescension to "the people." (Like every common man I adore the scene in *The Deer Hunter* when Robert De Niro, John Cazale, Christopher Walken, and the others in the bar sing "Can't Take My Eyes Off You" along with the jukebox, but when I saw it a few weeks ago it looked to me like a bunch of guys from Tribeca slumming in a Pennsylvania steel town.) Now conservatives deserve the same ridicule. The comforting fact is that there is no significant ideology and no significant policy agenda that is not represented among the elite. The appeal to authenticity is universal (Obama has his "folks" and the netroots have their "roots"), but it is universally beside the point. The wisdom of a policy is not determined by its social origins. There is a distinction between populism and "the people," though most populists do not want you to know it. The populism that bases its criticisms on a preference for one segment of the populace is merely another special interest, its denunciations of special interests notwithstanding. This does not mean that its criticisms are wrong; but when they are right, it is because their reasons are moral, not sociological. The appeasement of Wall Street after what Wall Street did to this country is objectionable not on grounds of class, but on grounds of fairness, of justice. Is there any more inclusive standard for public policy? (Financial regulatory reform *and* gay marriage: that's populism!) But justice is not well-pursued by resentment. The anti-politician politicians who seek the favor of angry Americans are deceiving them, because anger is nothing more lasting than a political consultant's contract. Emotions are stoked by elections and are spent by them. What remains after the great manipulation is the increasingly Sisyphean task of public reason, which is its own kind of insurgency.

Leon Wieseltier

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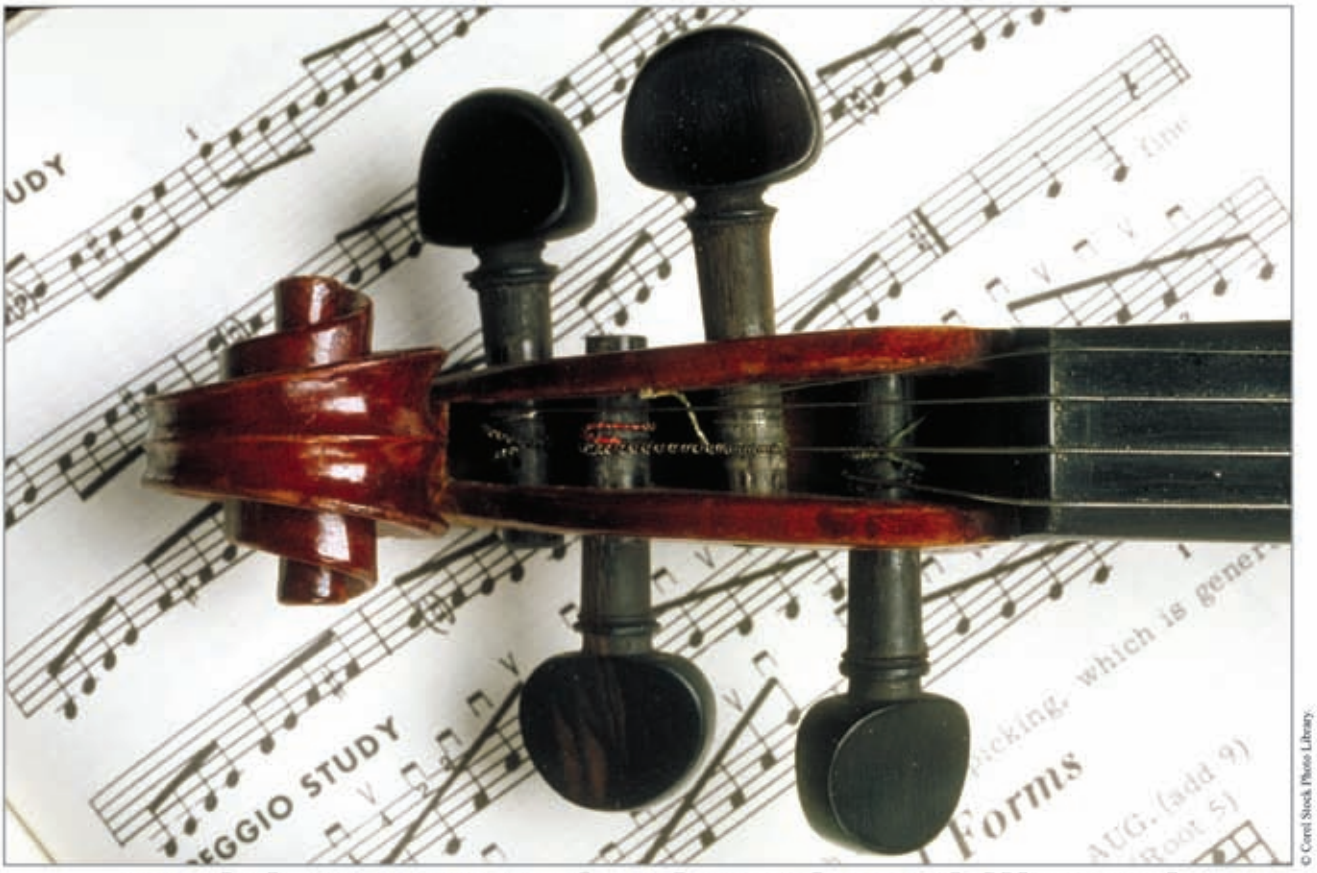

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